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'The Gardens of Saturn'

Paul J. McAuley

plus stories by

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff

Ramsey Campbell

Timons Esaias

Michael Moorcock

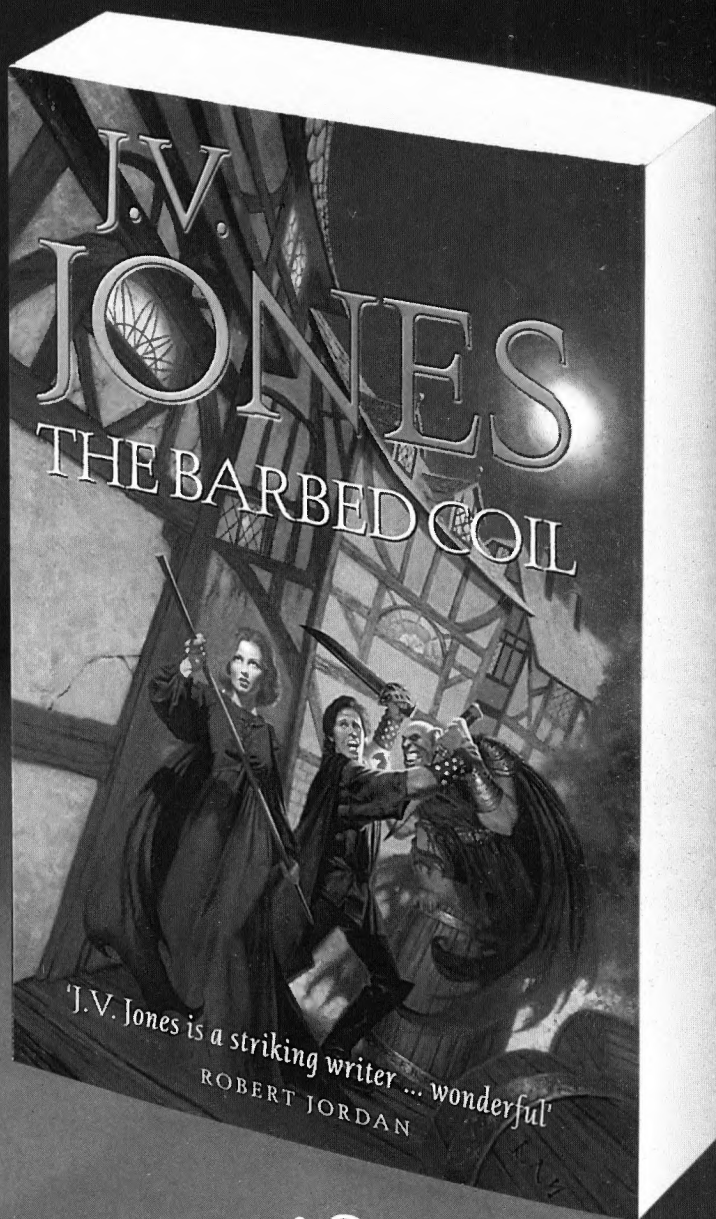
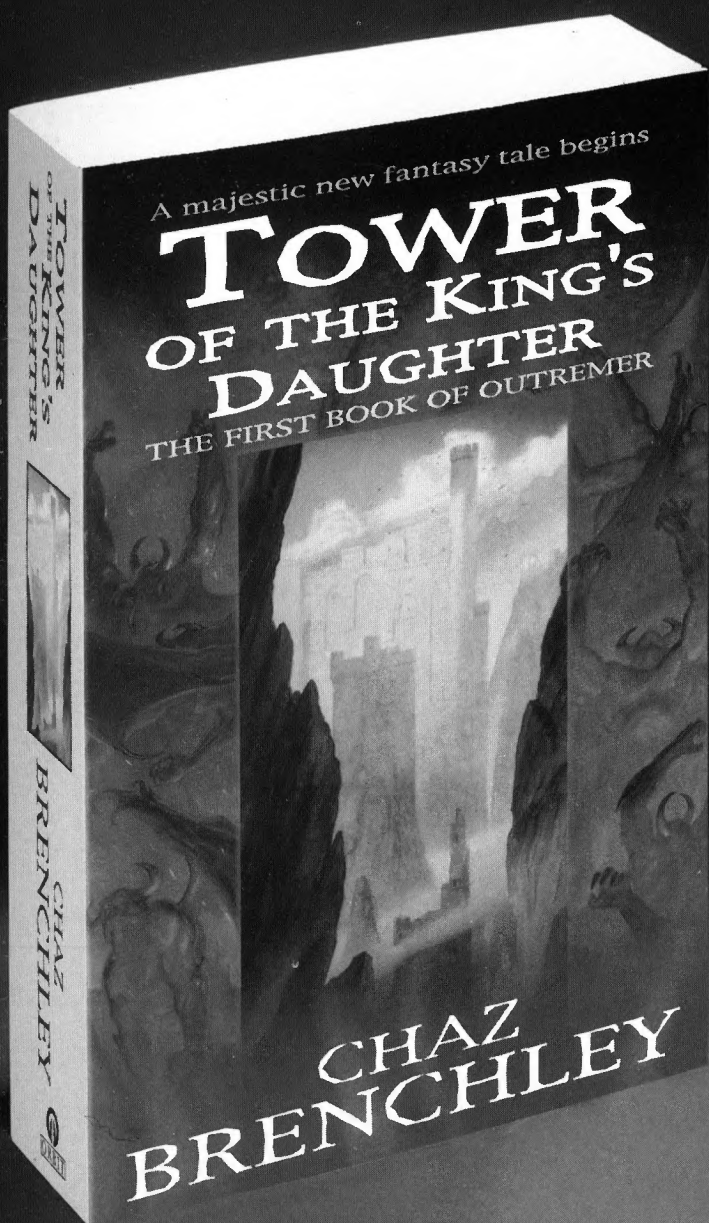
Sarah Singleton

and an interview with

John Shirley



One of these books
is fantastic...

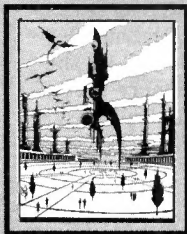


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interZone

November 1998

137

science fiction & fantasy

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SPECKLED TATERS

Dear Editors:

With ref. to Schweitzer's reasonable lament ("Interaction," *Interzone* 135): *The Spectator* has been a cheap, semi-literate voice of plummy young Tories for the past ten years. It's only taken seriously in parts of America where its 19th-century snobberies are still alive. The last time its literary pages had value was when Peter Ackroyd was running them. There was a time when their circulation was lower than *New Worlds*. But it was a much better journal, then... But never the most progressive voice of the fourth estate!

And while literary writers continue to associate themselves with people who wear large styrofoam heads, Darth Vader masks and Xena costumes, they will be continue to be dismissed by middle-class culture, which is a highly exclusive culture. Listen to Martin Amis sometime boasting about what he excludes, what he doesn't do, how it can't be done. These people are timid, cautious and cruel in their self-protection. I am contemptuous of most of that culture. It is, in the end, desolate and untruthful. It reflects the needs of a particular class. That's why I'm here now. That's what *New Worlds* was all about. Sf isn't a petitioner at some salon. It's a Hun, scouting out Vienna.

You celebrate the variety and vitality of the popular magazine (good piece on Haggard [*IZ* 135] – said much the same in *Wizardry & Wild Romance*) and you by your tastes and actions clearly identify with a popular form. (Haggard was a direct influence on my S&S.) There's a strong current argument that suggests all literary innovation comes from popular sources first. But you can't really expect to be a successful cowboy outlaw and be asked to tea in Washington at the same time. These people, as far as I'm concerned, are opponents. They stand for things I hate. They get worse by the day. They grin like the Home Service. They sound like Norman and Henry Bones and they think like Winnie the Pooh. They smell of cheap comforts. Fuck 'em... They have no history of their own.

Mike Moorcock

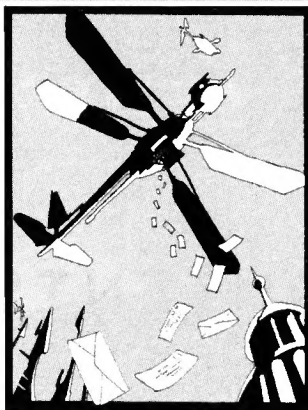
Bastrop, Texas

ANOTHER PRAT JOURNO

Dear Editors:

Other *Interzone* readers have probably spotted the following too but just in case they haven't: it appeared in *The Observer* and was Barbara Ellen's preview of the *Equinox* TV programme about gravity and ended thusly – "...some of which I couldn't understand because it was all to do with formulas, cosmic calculations, rogue comets and all sorts of other things that one would need a degree in Phillip (sic) K. Dick's novellas to even begin to comprehend. That's the trouble with these science pro-

+ Interaction +



grammes – they've got so much science in them." Sort of sums up the average journalist's attitude to, and ignorance of, both science and science fiction in one cretinous paragraph.

John Brosnan

London

Dear Editors:

If you're going to set up an award for "spectacularly ignorant coverage of sf in the mainstream media," that's fine, but be careful – it can cut both ways. Genre novelists are not above talking rubbish about non-genre fiction.

John Whitbourn says (*IZ* 135): "You read a book, you don't want reality." Speak for yourself, Mr Whitbourn. Reality and fantasy (in the broadest senses of both words) are both powerful tools for a novelist, and many utilize them both. Martin Amis and Salman Rushdie are poor examples to use, as Amis has written several non-realist novels and Rushdie's entire output is fantasy (or "magic realism" if you prefer). And who says Isaac Bashevis Singer is "just a story-teller"? The late Singer won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

There are plenty of modern novelists who can tell stories. And some of them win, or are nominated for, literary prizes.

Gary Couzens

Aldershot, Hants.

A BETTER PROSPECT?

Dear Editors:

On the subject of getting a better hearing for sf, have you tried the literary/political etc magazine *Prospect*? Admittedly it's an 11-times-a-year job rather than weekly, but that might still help if it gets a good reputation. I've no idea what it would be like on sf, although it does include science in its (wide) area of interest – I have been tempted into subscribing because it's more non-partisan (politically, that is) than most of the nearest equivalents and therefore doesn't make me want to throw up or do a murder!

Anyhow, if you want to check it

out, the address is 6, Bedford Square, London WC1B 3RA; e-mail:

prospect_magazine@compuserve.com

As regards stuff like Michael Harrington in *The Spectator* and all the rest, my only advice is ignore them: treat them with the contempt they deserve.

Stephen O'Kane

stgok@mistral.co.uk

Editor: With regard to sf, all I know about the (newish) British magazine *Prospect* is that it published an interview with J. G. Ballard lately (the August/September 1998 issue, a "profile" by Jason Cowley – who is described as "literary editor of the *New Statesman*"). Talking of JGB...

BALLARD DEFENDED

Dear Editors:

Recently, St Martin's Press has published *The Angle Between Two Walls: The Fiction of J. G. Ballard* by Roger Luckhurst. In the Preface, Roger Luckhurst discusses "...the enigma, the core of unreadability, that disturbs definitional frames and propels the interminable work of critical analysis."

UNREADABILITY!? INTERMINABLE WORK OF CRITICAL ANALYSIS? This absurd literary critic has no understanding at all of Ballard's work!

One does not have to do unending "critical analysis" to understand Ballard or his work. Ballard spent much of his childhood in a Japanese prison camp (*Empire of the Sun*). The usual hero of an American sf novel has considerable control over his environment and acts aggressively to influence events; prison-camp victims, in contrast, have almost no control over their surroundings. This produces a despairing mentality in survivors. They cannot ever forget their suffering, their helplessness and hopelessness. And their mental outlook gets close to the type of characters and anti-heroes Ballard writes about.

(I intuitively understand this mentality because my own parents, ethnic Germans from the Ukraine, were victims of Stalinist persecution of the "Kulaks" and, incredibly, survivors of the Soviet Gulags in Siberia and elsewhere. A major part of my own childhood was spent freeing myself from being a monument or "memorial candle" to their despairing, condemned-to-suffer view of life – and I did not even experience these events directly as Ballard did!)

Yet, in spite of such a childhood, Ballard has produced many works of incredible and terrible poetic beauty. "The Cloud-Sculptors of Coral D" and "The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista" in *Vermilion Sands* are some of my favourites which I first remember reading while waiting for a flight at Ton Son Nhut Airport in Saigon, Vietnam. *The Crystal World* produced this passage:

"By day fantastic birds flew through the petrified forest, and jewelled crocodiles glittered like heraldic salamanders on the banks of the crystalline river. By night the illuminated man raced among the trees, his arms like golden cartwheels, his head like a spectral crown..."

I admit I have a weakness for such abstracted, poetic and slightly purple prose. (I also loved M. John Harrison's "The Lamia and Lord Cromis" in Michael Moorcock's 1971 *New Worlds Quarterly* #1.) But no matter how warped or twisted, no matter how convoluted or abstracted, you can never say that Ballard is "unreadable"!

In "The Concentration City" from *The Disaster Area*, Ballard equals the profundity of Jorge Luis Borges' "The Library of Babel" in describing an endless underground (?) city with streets and avenues going on forever (Millionth Street) and forever. Ballard's reputation for "unreadability," if it even exists, might come from such works as *The Atrocity Exhibition*, published during the Vietnam War, in which he gave up the short-story format for short paragraphs "illustrating" the horrors of the times. But even the depictions of napalmed children were not "unreadable."

Also, the fascination of Ballard's characters with passive observation, "the angle between the walls," and the purity of geometry reflects a very unhealthy abnormal mental state induced by starvation, incarceration and sensory deprivation found in prison camps. I hope that you can take on this ignorant, squeamish, ridiculous critic and reveal him for the fool he is.

Felix Polz

Lt. Col., USAR (Ret.)

Editor: Your personal testimony is very interesting and welcome, but I think you may have misread the still-youthful Roger Luckhurst's rather heavy academic irony. He is a Ballard fan from 'way back – from his mid-teens, or thereabouts (I know because he used to write to me at that time, in the 1980s). Now that he has grown up, has a doctorate in Eng. Lit. and teaches capital-T "Theory" at the University of London, he remains keenly interested in Ballard but feels obliged to couch all his writings in the inviolated language of postmodernist criticism – a language which, thanks to the examples of its masters such as Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, can be difficult in the extreme (explicitly designed as it is to exclude all laypersons) but which nevertheless can yield occasional rewards. The important thing, if you're concerned for the long-term literary reputation of a writer like Ballard, is that new generations of critics continue to write about him: it's better for a writer to be "critiqued" in some peculiar latter-day jargon than to be ignored altogether.

IT'S THAT MAN AGAIN

Dear Editors:

While I ordinarily would not wish to occupy more space in your magazine than I have been allotted, I should probably explain, for the benefit of Katherine Roberts (*IZ* 134) and others, the reason for my regular use of feminine pronouns.

The background: around 1970 or so, American feminists began to complain that it was blatantly sexist to inflexibly refer to all unknown or unspecified individuals with masculine pronouns ("Everybody has his own style"), as the rules of grammar then dictated. They had a point. Unfortunately, no entirely satisfactory solution to the problem has yet emerged, at least on my side of the Atlantic.

I have been told that British English has accepted the use of ungendered plural pronouns to accompany singular nouns and pronouns ("Everybody has their own style"), but American grammarians have vehemently resisted this policy. One can make the preceding noun or pronoun plural ("All people have their own styles"), but the results are not always euphonious, and some statements cannot logically be made plural, like "Somebody left his backpack in the room." There are several combine-the-genders approaches, including "he or she" (hopelessly awkward, especially if used more than once, and one feminist complained because the male always went first), "he/she" (which must be read as "he slash she," interpreted by at least one feminist as advocacy of violence against women), and the precious "(s)he" (useless because the logically equivalent objective form "h(er)im" does not exist – since it would sound too much like "harem"?). One finally encounters the advice to alternately use male and female pro-

nouns, but I have far too many other concerns while writing to keep track of whether it is "he's" turn or "she's" turn, or to go through and count my pronouns to ensure that each gender appears exactly 50% of the time.

And so, a decade ago, I decided that the best policy to follow in my own writing would be to always treat the unspecified or unknown person as female ("Everybody has her own style," "Somebody left her backpack in the room"). Rhetorically, it is almost invariably the simplest and most elegant strategy; and ideologically, if the English language has for centuries improperly regarded masculinity as the norm, it seems only fair to regard femininity as the norm for a while – at least until someone devises a better solution. And, assuming that even the most strident feminist would approve of this policy, I recommended this approach to my students in writing classes. My assumption was incorrect.

The problem, I now conclude, is that when I speak about an unspecified or unknown person, my remarks are often critical (as surprising as that might seem to *Interzone* readers growing accustomed to my mild, inoffensive manner), so that my automatic use of feminine pronouns can be interpreted as a deliberate criticism of women. Thus, several years ago, when one of my articles described the typical science-fiction fan (in a not entirely complimentary analysis) as a "she," an irritated woman wrote in to complain that she found the usage "condescending." And, while Katherine Roberts is thankfully bemused rather than indignant, she also theorizes that my intent was to criticize women: my use of the feminine pronoun either represented my veiled attack on an unnamed female author, or it reflected my determination to include female writers in my assault on interactive fiction even if none were cited in my column.

As a result, I have now altered the advice that I give my students: it is acceptable to employ feminine pronouns to refer to unspecified or unknown persons as long as the remarks are neutral or complimentary; if, however, the remarks are in any way critical, the use of masculine pronouns is recommended.

How wonderful it is that sexism is being purged from the English language!

Gary Westfahl

University of California, Riverside

Editor: I've heard tell that there are instances in both Shakespeare and Jane Austen of the use of "they" to mean "he or she" – so, if the two greatest writers in the language have used it, it must be acceptable, whatever American schoolmarm's say.

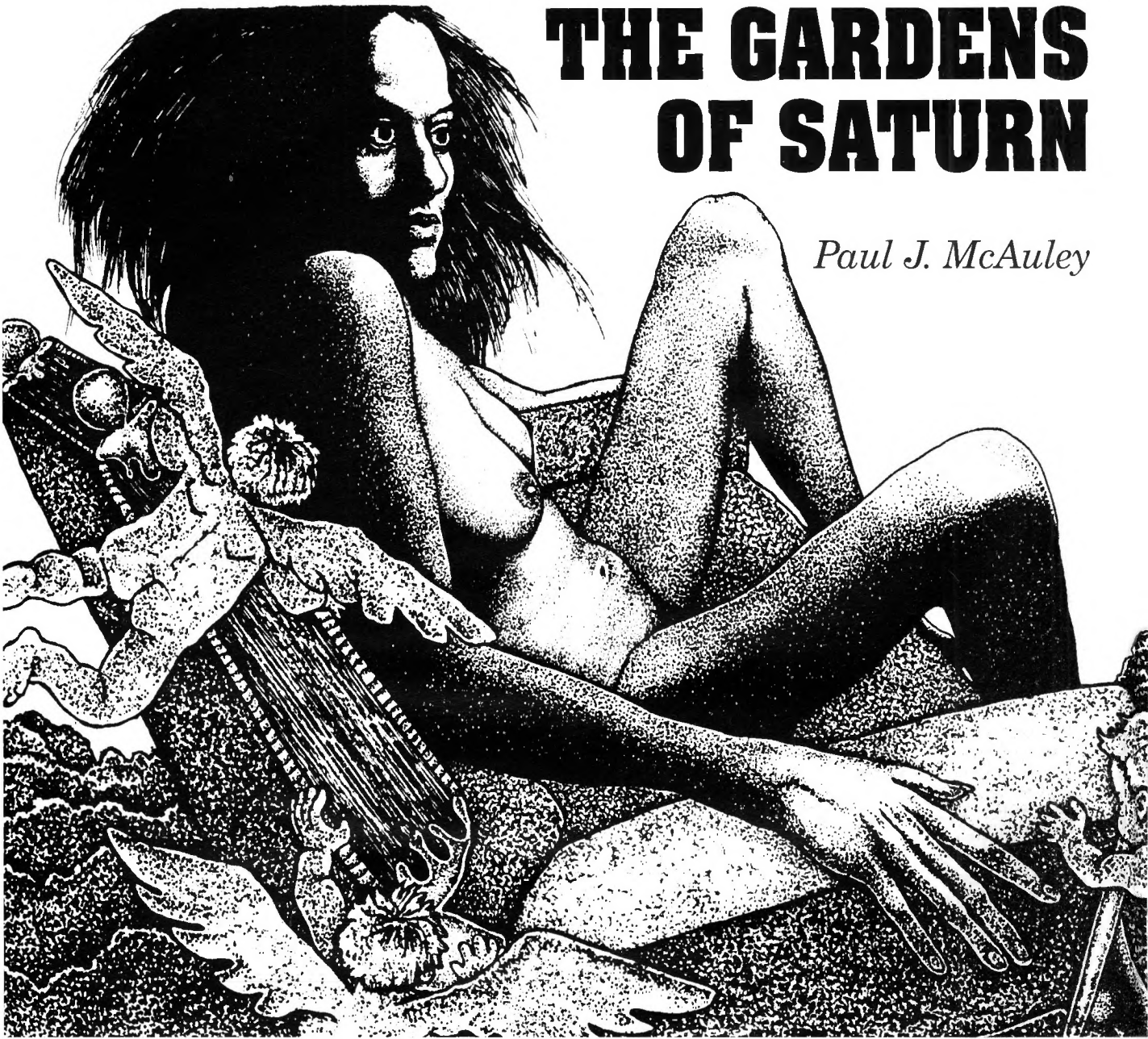
INTERZONE WINS A BRITISH FANTASY AWARD

This statuette of the mighty Cthulhu marks *Interzone's* achievement as "Best Small Press" (September 1998)



THE GARDENS OF SATURN

Paul J. McAuley



Baker was in the pilots' canteen, talking about the price of trace elements with a couple of factors, when someone started making trouble at the servitor. A tall skinny redhead in baggy flight pants and a tight jumper with the sleeves torn off had hooked her left arm around one of the servitor's staples and was kicking hell out of it with her bare feet, bouncing hard each time and coming back, shouting at the machine, "You want how much for this shit?" and kicking it again.

Obviously she hadn't been on Phoebe very long, or she would have known that for all their girder-up-the-ass morals the Redeemers were gougers of the worst kind. It was Baker's nature to try and like everybody, but even he had a hard time being charitable about them. His collective could afford only basic environmental amenities when visiting other habitats, and on Phoebe those were very basic indeed – tank food and a coffin not much bigger than the lysesystem on the scow. If you wanted a shower you paid for two minutes and a hundred litres of grey water; beer or any other luxury goods were available only at premium rates. It was take it or leave it, and everyone had to take it because

Phoebe's orbit and the Redeemers' expertise in cargo-handling and routing made it the prime resupply, rendezvous and transfer site in all of the Saturn system.

Baker could have stayed on board his scow, of course, but even he needed to get out and about occasionally. At least here you could raise your arms over your head, and sculling about the public areas cost nothing. And besides, he liked talking to people. He had a lot of friends. He had friends everywhere he went in the system. It was the way he'd been rebuilt.

People all around the canteen started to cheer every kick the woman gave the servitor, happy to get some free entertainment, to see someone vent the frustration they all felt. "That feisty little old thing could come and work me over anytime," one of the factors at Baker's table said; her partner, a scarred and wrinkled woman about a hundred years old, cracked a grin and told her that it would be like setting a Titan tiger against an air cow.

At the same moment, Baker got a tingle of recognition. Like most of the public areas of the Phoebe habitat, the canteen was a basic microgravity architectural sphere, and Baker was tethered to a table upsidedown



Illustrations by Russell Morgan

above the woman, like a bat hung from the ceiling, but there was something familiar about her...

"I have called for help," the servitor said in a monotonous foghorn voice. "Please desist. I have called for help."

The woman grabbed a black cable studded with lenses which had snaked out to peer at her, said "Fuck you," and got a round of applause when she broke it off. People, mostly men, started to shout advice to her, but then everyone fell silent, because one of the supervisors had swum into the canteen.

The creepy thing about the Redeemers wasn't that they all had been chopped to look alike, or that you couldn't tell which had once been male and which female, or even that they all had grey skin the colour of the thermal paint that goes over a hull before its final finish, but that they provided no cues at all as to what they might be feeling.

This one was as long and skinny as the rest, in a one-piece suit that looked as if it was made out of bandages. It moved swiftly, flowing through the air straight at the red-headed woman, who recoiled and said loudly, "This fucking machine sucked the credit out of my chip and

won't give it up."

Everyone was looking at her as she hung with one arm casually locked around the one of the staples in the servitor's fascia, her head turned up now to glare at the Redeemer, who kept his place in midair with minute swimming motions of one long, spidery hand, like a reef barracuda wondering whether to attack or pass by, and Baker unclipped his tether because now he knew that he knew her.

Jackson. Vera Flamillion Jackson. Colonel Jackson.

Don't do anything dumb, his sidekick said, and when Baker told it that she was an old friend, it added, Everyone's your friend, but it isn't good to get involved.

The woman was talking fast and low now, stopping when the Redeemer said something, shaking her head and talking again, her words lost in the hum of the fans which were pushing warm stale air about and the chatter of the people all around. Baker kicked out from the table, turning neatly in midair so he landed right-side-up by the woman, hooking an arm through the same staple from which she hung and seeing her turn and grin, recognizing him at once, as if the past 30 years had never happened.

They exchanged life stories over a couple of bulbs of cold beer, Baker's treat because Jackson had no credit on her. It pretty much wiped out the small amount he'd set aside to spend here; against the advice of his sidekick he'd also paid the fine the Redeemer had insisted on levying. He'd have to check out of the coffin hotel and go sleep on the scow, but he didn't mind. Jackson was an *old* friend, and if he remembered her then once upon a time she must have been important to him.

They'd been teenagers in the war and although Jackson was pushing 50 now, she still looked good. Maybe a little gaunt, and with lines cross-hatching her fine-grained milk-white skin, but she still had a flirtatious way of looking at him from beneath the floating fringe of her red hair. Baker didn't remember too much about his life before the accident, but he remembered that look, and seeing it now made him feel strange. There were black tattoos on her neck and upper arms, crude knotted swirls lacking animation, and she was missing her little finger on her right hand, but, yes, she looked good. She'd been married, he learned, her way of joining a collective that had built a habitat inside a hollowed-out asteroid. That hadn't worked out, she wasn't exactly clear why, and now she was here.

Once or twice their fingers brushed together and he got a tingle as her net tried to access his, but his sidekick blocked the attempts easily. Her net hadn't been modified, it said, and just as well, because she's dangerous.

She's an old friend, Baker insisted, irritated by the sidekick's paranoia. I'm not going to do anything crazy. Just talk about old times, about who I used to be.

What's the point of that? the sidekick said. She's trouble, and don't say I didn't warn you.

"I got bored with it," Jackson was saying, meaning the collective she'd left. "Spending most of the time worrying about stabilizing the ecology. Might as well have settled down on a rock."

"Instead of in one," Baker said, and laughed at his own joke.

"In, out, same thing. Too many people to deal with, too much routine. I mean, have you ever tried to *grow* plants?" Before he could answer, she leaned at the rail of the promenade and added, "You ever get claustrophobic in a place like this?"

They were on one of the upper levels of the Shaft. It had been bored two kilometres into Phoebe's icy mantle with a singleshoot fusion laser and was capped with a diamond dome; you could look up through webs and cables and floating islands of plants and see Saturn's small crescent tipped in the black sky. Each level was ringed around with terraced gardens glowing green under sunlamps, neatly planted out with luxury crops, even flowers, level after level of gardens ringing the well of the Shaft. Parts of the upper levels were open to visitors, but most was exclusive Redeemer territory, unknown and unknowable.

Baker said, "I used to help in the farms, but I like what I do now better."

He was married into a collective, but he didn't think he needed to tell her that. It was a business thing; he hardly saw any of his wives or co-husbands from one year to the next and he certainly couldn't fuck anyone in the marriage – or vice versa – without permission

from one of the elders. There'd been a sweet honeymoon week with the youngest of the collective's wives, but that had pretty much been it.

That isn't what counts, his sidekick said, and Baker brushed at his ear in annoyance.

Jackson said, "In the war we could go anywhere. That's what I miss."

"Well, we went where we were told."

"Yeah, but we did it our way. We fucked the enemy up pretty good, too. You still see any of the guys?"

"No, not really."

"Me either. Remember Goodluck Crowe? He must surely be dead the way he was going."

Baker shrugged and smiled.

"That time he came in with his bird's venturis fucked, spinning eccentrically? Crashed into one of the ports and the last of his fuel went up and bounced the remains of his ship straight back out? And then he's found down in one of the cargo bays in his p-suit, lost in pitch darkness because his suit light got smashed. The explosion shot him out and he was so dazed he didn't know where he was? He banged up his knee I recall, floating about in there, but that was all."

"Well," Baker said, still smiling, "I guess he went back to Earth."

"How many missions did you fly?"

"I think six." He knew exactly because he'd once paid a data miner to look up his combat record.

She said, "Do you still do that counting thing?"

"Counting thing?"

"You know, with potatoes. One potato, two potato. To count seconds. Three potato, four. You don't remember?"

He had done it out loud, she said, while suppressing the clock functions of his net, claiming that it help him concentrate on the essential moment. They'd timed him once; over ten minutes he'd deviated by less than a second.

"You don't remember?"

Her gaze was steady, and Baker felt a touch of embarrassment and looked away. She clearly remembered more about him than he did; it was like suddenly finding yourself naked. He said, "It sounds stupid to me. What's the point of trying to do something better than a brainless machine?"

She said, "It's funny. You were listed missing in action, one of the few casualties on our side. But here you are, and you don't seem much like the man I used to know."

He told her the story. He'd told it so many times now that it was polished smooth and bright. He'd told it so many times that he believed that he remembered what had happened, even though it was a reconstruction. He'd been so badly injured that he had no memory of the accident which had nearly killed him, and only patchy memories of the times before.

Like all combat pilots in the Quiet War, he had been a teenager, picked for his quick reflexes, multi-tasking skills and coolness under pressure. He'd been zipped into a singleship, its lifestystem an integral pressure suit that fed and cleaned him and maintained his muscle tone with patterned electrical stimuli while he flew the ship and its accompanying flock of deadly little remote control drones. Each singleship took a different orbit, swooping through Saturn's rings in complex multiple

encounter orbits, attacking flyby targets with the drones when the timelag in the feedback was less than a second, never using the same tactic twice. Like all the combat pilots, Baker had been essentially a telepresence operator infiltrated into the enemy's territory, spending most of his time in Russian sleep with the singleship's systems powered down, waking an hour before the brief high-velocity encounters between drones and target, making a hundred decisions in the crucial few seconds and then vanishing into the rings again. It had been just one front of the Quiet War between the Outer System colonists and the Three Powers Alliance of Earth, less important than the damage done by spies, the economic blitz, and the propaganda campaign.

Saturn's rings were a good place to hide, but they were dangerous, the biggest concentration of rubble and dust in the Solar System, shepherded by tiny moons and tidal resonances into orbits 100,000 kilometres wide and only 15 deep. Baker's singleship passed and repassed through the rings more than a hundred times, and then a single pinhead-sized bit of rock killed him. It smashed through the thick mantle of airfoam that coated the singleship's hull and punched a neat hole in the hull, breaking up into more than a dozen particles that had all penetrated the six layers of Baker's lifestream and the gel which cased his sleeping body. Some shattered the artificial-reality visor of his facemask and left charred tracks through his skull and brain; others smashed through the singleship's computer; one ruptured a fuel line.

He'd died without knowing it, but the singleship had saved him. Nanotech in the lifestream gel sealed ruptured blood vessels; the lifestream drained his blood and replaced it with an artificial plasma rich in glycoproteins, lowered his body temperature to two degrees. Although the singleship's automatic systems were only partially functional, they powered up its motor, ready to expend its fuel in a last burn to accelerate it into a long-period orbit where it might be retrieved. But most of the fuel had already leaked away and the burn terminated after only a few seconds, leaving the singleship tumbling in a chaotic orbit.

The Quiet War ended a few days later; in the aftermath, there was only a cursory search for the missing singleship. Fifteen years passed before it was spotted by a long-range survey. A collective retrieved it a year later, looking for scrap value and finding Baker. They revived him and used foetal cells to regrow the damaged parts of his brain, upgraded the neural net through which he had interfaced with the singleship and the drones. He had worked for the collective for two years, paying off the debt, and then they had let him marry into their extended family.

At the end of the story, Jackson said, "Well, I guess that out-does Goodluck Crowe. So now you're working for them?"

"I'm a partner."

"Yeah, right. Funny, isn't it? We helped win the Quiet War, our own governments encouraged us to settle here, and then we were shafted. What do you pilot?"

"A scow. I do freight runs."

"That's just what I mean," Jackson said. "Most of the freight in this system is rail-gunned. You used to be a

hot-shot pilot and now you're working the edge, picking up part-cargoes, trading margins on luxury items. I bet they'd use a chip instead of you if they could."

"I choose my own routes. I do business on the Bourse."

"Puttering around, making half a cent a kilo on the marginal price difference of vitamins between Daphoene and Rhea. Hardly the same as combat, is it?"

"I don't remember too much from before my accident," Baker said amiably. "Are you still a pilot?"

"Well, I guess I'm sort of freelance."

Baker felt a twinge of alarm. His sidekick said, If she asks for credit, you will not give it. I think that she was in the prison farms – the tattoos suggest that. I told you that this was a bad idea.

Something must have shown on his face, because Jackson said, "I have credit. Plenty of it – I'm staying in the Hilton. But, see, it's all *room* credit."

Baker didn't understand.

Be careful, his sidekick said. Here it comes.

"See," Jackson said, her bright blue eyes fixed on his, "I thought I'd walk about for a while. Stretch muscles. Then I wanted a beer, and the fucking machine sucked all the credit from my chip and wouldn't give anything up. Tell me about your ship."

"Hamilton Towmaster, prewar but reconditioned. Daeyo motors, 80,000 kilos thrust. She's a good old flamebucket. She'll probably outlast me."

"You get where you're going?"

"Pretty much anywhere in the system."

Although mostly it was runs back and forth between Titan and Phoebe. The collective was one of the contractors on the Titan project. Titan was lousy with organics, but it was presently one vast storm and would be for another century, until the terraforming began to stabilize, so fixed carbon and other biomass for the construction crews had to be imported from Phoebe's vacuum farms, and that was what Baker mostly hauled.

Jackson sucked on the last of her beer; the thin plastic of the bulb made a crinkling sound as it contracted. She said, "It's a pretty sorry state. Here we are, both of us on the winning side of the war, and the tweaks have got us fucked."

Baker looked around, but luckily none of the incredibly tall, stick-thin people ambling about the promenade with the slow shuffle required by sticky shoes seemed to have heard her. Calling an Outer System colonist a tweak was like calling one of Baker's ancestors a nigger. The original colonists had undergone extensive engineering to adapt them to microgravity; incomers like Baker made do with widgets in their blood and bones to maintain calcium balance and the like, and in most places in the Outer System medical liability laws ensured that they weren't allowed to have children.

Jackson said, "Ordinary people like us have to stick together. That way we can show the tweaks what real humans can do. The way I see it, the war is still going on."

Baker said, "What exactly is it you do now?"

Jackson crumpled the empty bulb and dropped it over the rail; it fell away slowly towards one of the nets. She said, "Come see where I live these days."

The hotel was two levels down, a terrace landscaped as rolling parkland, with lawns and colourful flowerbeds, and clumps of trees grown into puffy clouds of leaves the

way they did in microgravity. Little carts ambled here and there between the cabins. Baker had been to Phoebe 50 or 60 times but he had never before been here. This was where vips from Earth stayed, along with *novo abastado* industrialists and miners who rendezvoused here to make deals because the Redeemers were scrupulous about commercial confidentiality.

Jackson had to sign Baker in. Blinking on the flash of the retinal print camera, he sat next to her on a cart which took them deep into the level. A sky projection hid the rocky ceiling high above; in the middle air, a couple of people were trolling about on gossamer wings. The guests could hunt here too, Jackson said, although the meat remained the property of the Redeemers.

"You buy a licence to go out and shoot one of the little cows or mammoths they have here, and then you pay all over again if you want a steak."

Baker said, "You ever done it?"

"I've other fish to fry," she said.

He was very aware of her warmth, next to him on the bench seat of the cart, hips and shoulders touching. He was also aware of his sidekick's unhappiness; it hadn't stopped complaining since he'd accepted Jackson's invitation. She's an old friend, Baker told it, and it said, Yes, but everyone is your friend and that's why I give you advice you'd do best to listen to.

But Jackson *was* an old friend, a very special friend. A war comrade, maybe even a lover. Although Baker didn't remember anything specific, sitting next to her he definitely felt that they had once had something special, and she certainly seemed to think so. For all the edge she tried to put into her voice and body-language, her trust was quite wonderfully naïve.

The cart rolled over neatly-trimmed green grass at a leisurely walking pace and circled around a big stand of bamboos and yellow-flowered mimosa, and there was one of the cabins, a dome turfed over with grass, little round windows like rabbit holes glinting here and there. A door dilated as the cart approached, and then they were inside a big room with carpet all over the walls and pits for places to sit or sleep. When Baker remarked on the size of the place, Jackson said that it didn't matter how big a cell it was, it was still a cell.

"I thought this was cool at first," she said, "but I'd just upgraded is all. I'm still stuck here, but I think now I know a way out."

The sidekick had started to complain again. Baker winced and, something he hardly ever did, switched it to stand-by mode. The silence was a relief; he gave Jackson a goofy smile which obviously puzzled her.

She said, "You'll see who I work for, then you'll get an idea of what I mean."

They put on sticky shoes and shuffled down a long curved ramp into a lower level, coming out in a room that was all white tiles and bright light, with a circular pool of polystyrene balls rippling back and forth, something big and pink half-buried in them. Some kind of animal Baker thought, and then it spoke and he realized that it was a man, the fattest man he'd ever seen, masked with artificial-reality goggles and twiddling his hands this way and that.

"Time to wake up," Jackson said loudly. "I'm back, Berry, and I've brought a friend."

The fat man cut the air with a hand; his goggles

unfilmed. "Where have you been?" he said, his voice childish and petulant.

"I was out on an errand," Jackson said, her voice echoing off the tiles, "but I'm back now. Do you need anything?"

"Didn't know where you were," the man said.

"Well, here I am now. You been lying there all this time? You'll lose the use of your legs."

"Help me to the surface if you want," the man said, "but not right now. I'm deep in the Ten Thousand Flower Rift. I think I might get through to the Beast's chateau this time."

He rose and fell with the big, slow waves that rolled from one side of the pool of polystyrene balls to the other and back again. There was a little machine floating in the air close by his head, holding a bulb of thick white liquid, and he lifted his face now and sucked at a straw noisily.

Jackson said quietly to Baker, "So now you see who I work for."

"He's got to be the fattest man I've ever seen. Massing, golly, it must be 200 kilos at least."

"One hundred sixty. He tends to spread out a bit lying down."

"What does he do?"

"Mostly he just lies right there and runs these antique 200-year-old sagas and drinks, or lies around on grass and runs his sagas and drinks. That's margarita mix he's working on there, he gets through a couple of litres of that a day. And he uses other stuff, too. He does like his drugs, lying buck naked there or out on the grass under the sunlamps. They have some uv in their spectrum, so I have to rub cream on him to stop him burning. He can get about if he has to, but it hurts him even in microgravity, so he mostly stays on his back. There're air jets under the balls, help him stay afloat."

"I mean, who is he? How can he afford all this?"

"Berry Malachite Hong-Owen; his mother is Sri Hong-Owen. That doesn't mean anything to you? She invented one of the two important vacuum organism photosynthetic systems, made her rich as all hell. Berry is her son by her first and only marriage, a reject with a trust fund, doesn't have to do anything but let the money roll in." Jackson raised her voice and said, "You all right there, Berry? I got a bit of business with my friend here. You shout if you want anything."

Back up in the dome, Baker and Jackson sipped bulbs of a smoky brandy. Jackson lit a marijuana cigarette, too – Berry could afford the tax, she said.

Baker said, "How did you get the job? It looks like fun."

Jackson didn't answer for a moment, holding a volume of smoke before blowing it out and saying in a small, tight voice, "Fun? The one other thing Berry likes to do is fuck. He can manage it in microgravity, just about, although it takes some care." She fixed Baker with her bright blue eyes, daring him to say something. When he didn't, she took another drag and said through the smoke, "That's part of what I was doing before I met him – the fucking Redeemers sell you a prostitute's licence and you pay tax on every bit of business. I may be old, but some of the tweaks do like the exotic. The rest of the time I was part of the gardening crew, moving bushes and trees here and there, replanting flower

beds. I didn't have much choice – I lost my ticket off through a piece of foolishness. I got to hear of Berry and did some research, and made myself indispensable to him. He likes older women – I think he misses his mother. But the fucker's crafty. His trust fund pays for room and service, but he doesn't have anything much in the way of transferable credit. Doesn't need it, he says, because he never leaves the hotel."

"Doesn't he pay you?"

"He did at first, but then I was living here and I told him to save his credit. It wasn't that much anyway, not enough to parlay up for any kind of good ticket and I don't fancy leaving here as a corpsicle in steerage."

Baker began to see where this was going, and felt a twinge of pleasurable excitement. He had been right to think that there might be something in this, and it could well fall within the very wide parameters which allowed him to operate without consulting the collective. He said cautiously, "The thing is, the ship isn't exactly mine."

"I'm not looking for a lift," Jackson said leaning forward through her cloud of smoke. "I'm looking for a partner in a deal so sweet it could rot your teeth just thinking about it. Let me tell you about Berry."

Berry's mother, Sri Hong-Owen, was a gene wizard with a shadowy, mysterious history. The system of artificial photosynthesis she had invented had made her as rich and famous as her rival, Avernus, but she had also done a lot of covert work before and after the Quiet War. Before the war, she was rumoured to have set up an illegal experiment in accelerated evolution of vacuum organisms somewhere in the Kuiper Belt for the Democratic Union of China; during the war, she had helped design the biowar organisms which had taken Europa, and she was said to have been involved in a covert program of human gengineering. And after the war, she had announced that she was retiring (which no one believed), and had taken advantage of the resettlement scheme to take up residence at the edge of the ring system of Saturn.

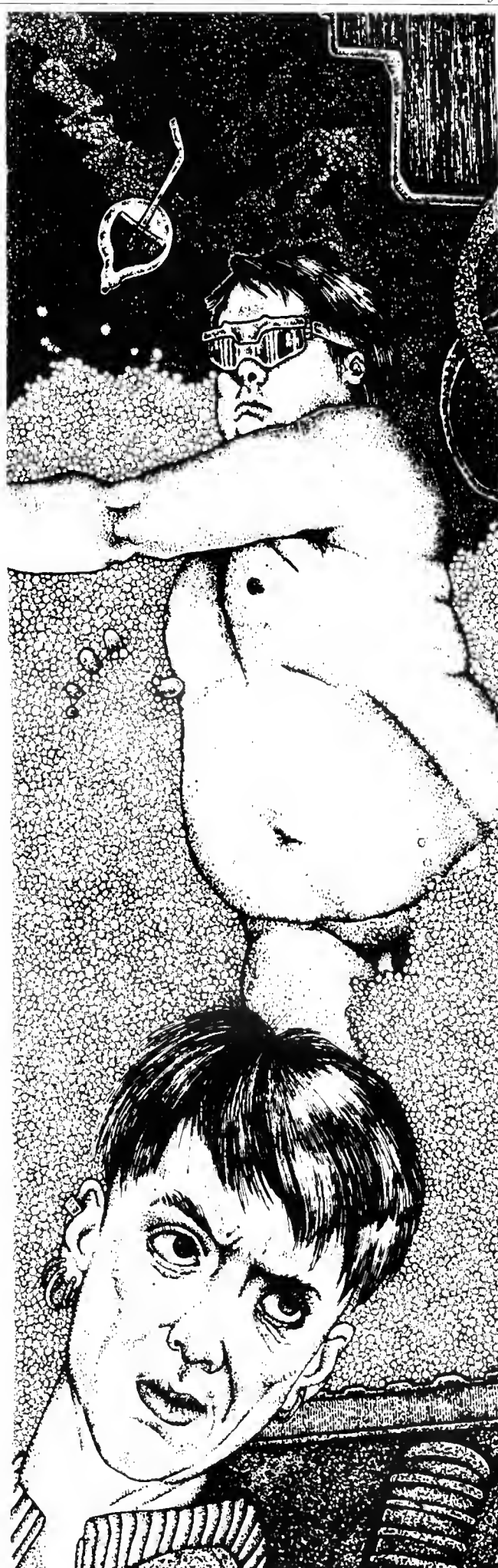
"Potato One and Two," Jackson said. "Remember?"

"Sure, but they're just a couple of rocks, something to do with the military, I think. Anyway, no one lives there."

"That's what they want everyone to think," Jackson said.

Potato One and Two were the nicknames of a pair of co-orbital satellites, tiny chunks of rock which had probably been shattered off a larger body by some ancient impact. Their orbits were within 50 kilometres of each other, beyond the edge of the F Ring. Sri Hong-Owen lived in absolute seclusion on the larger moon, Janus; she had registered the smaller, Epimetheus, as an experimental area. Berry had left – or had been thrown out – ten years ago; the other son by her failed marriage, Alder Topaz Hong-Owen, was working somewhere on Earth, perhaps as liaison with whichever government or *corporado* was sponsoring his mother's current work. She had good and influential connections in the Three Powers Occupation Force; Jackson said that it was likely she was working on some covert military gengineering program. The two moons were off-limits, protected by fierce automatic defence systems, but Berry had the right to return there.

Jackson told Baker, "Berry misses her badly. He talks about her a lot, but there's something which stops him



returning. I think he was kinked, given some sort of conditioning. He has the codes which will get us through her defence system, and I know what they are – it didn't take anything more than withholding his margarita ration for a couple of days. We can say that he paid us to bring him back, ask for money to take him away again. It's like kidnapping, but in reverse."

"Suppose she doesn't pay up?"

Baker didn't need the prompting of his sidekick to know that Jackson wasn't telling him the whole story, not that it really mattered if his own scheme worked out, but he found that he liked the illicit thrill of becoming involved in her shady plot. Perhaps this was the way he had felt in the brief moments of combat, all those years ago before the accident had changed his life for ever.

Jackson shrugged. "She doesn't pay, then we say we'll kill him, or we'll think of doing some damage to her experiments. But really, why wouldn't she pay? Who'd want Berry around all the time?"

Baker and Jackson got Berry out of the pool of polystyrene balls and helped him totter on shaky legs up the ramp to the outside. He flopped down on the grass like a pink barrage balloon and demanded that Jackson rub cream into his skin. That took a while, Berry grunting and sometimes giggling as Jackson rubbed coconut-scented cream into the hectares of his pink flesh. Baker was pretty sure it would end in some kind of sex and wandered off, taking big floating steps, and found some shade under a stand of umbrella trees. A herd of miniature red-haired mammoths was grazing off in the distance, moving in tentative tip-toe slow motion. A vine twisted around one of the umbrella trees and Baker picked at its grapes, each a slightly different flavour bursting on his tongue, wondering if he should reactivate his sidekick. The truth was, he didn't want to hear what it would say; it wasn't programmed to take risks. He used his net to dial into Phoebe's infoweb, and did a little research of his own. At last Jackson floated down beside him and told him that Berry was asleep.

"So," she said, "will you do it?"

"Remind me of the percentages again."

"Twenty per cent goes to you, less any costs. But that's still a lot of credit."

"Sure. I mean, yes, count me in."

He realized that he'd been thinking about it while seeming not to think about anything at all. His net was very sophisticated. It was risky, but the potential – not the silly scheme of Jackson's – was huge.

Jackson leaned over and kissed him; he kissed her back.

"He's sleeping now," she said, after a while. "All that drinking and floating and floating and drinking does tire him out."

"He hasn't asked why I'm here?"

"I said you were my brother. He accepted that. Berry doesn't like to think too hard about things. He's like a kid. When he wakes up he'll want a drink, and I'll put something in it that'll keep him quiet so we can get him aboard."

"We have to take him?"

"I don't like it either. But it's the only way we can file a flight plan, and we'll need to prove that we really do

have him when we get there."

Once they were aboard the scow and had everything squared away Jackson stripped off her jumper and trousers and they fucked. Baker couldn't think of it as making love; it was as much a business transaction as his wedding night with the youngest wife of the collective. Jackson wanted to interface systems during sex, the way they used to, or so she claimed, but Baker held back. She fell straight asleep afterwards, and Baker thought about it all over again, looking for loose threads and unexpected angles.

They had gone aboard late at night. Jackson had slipped a tranquillizer into Berry's nightcap and he had fallen asleep almost immediately. They had used a luggage cart to get him to the docks, no problem there; the Redeemers didn't care what was loaded onto ships as long as they got their tax. That was another reason why Phoebe was so successful.

There hadn't been a problem stowing Berry away, either; Jackson had already thought of that.

As for the rest, the run itself was fairly simple, and Baker had already filed a flight plan, getting clearance with Berry's identity code just as Jackson had said he would. If Sri Hong-Owen had an agent in the intelligence network of the pan-Saturn flight control system, she'd already know someone was on the way; she might already be taking counter-measures. Baker would have to think of what she might do, and how to get around it.

He was scared but also elated. After going over everything in his head, he could at last fall asleep.

But when he woke up, things had gone badly wrong.

He woke up because Jackson was slapping him, slapping his face, slapping him hard in a back-and-forth rhythm with the same angry intensity with which she had attacked the servitor, saying over and over, "You fucker. Come on out of it, you fucker. Come on. Don't die on me."

He tried to get away but he was trussed like a food animal in the web hammock in the centre of the scow's compact lifecosystem. Jackson's left hand gripped his right wrist tightly. His head hurt badly and behind the pain there was a terrible absence. Stuff hung in front of Jackson's angry, intent, face – columns, indices, a couple of thumbnails. She had jacked her net into his, broken into it using some kind of trojan horse, and was using it to run the ship. Hand-holding, the pilots had called it, a kind of piggy-backing that had been used in training.

The soundscape of the scow had changed. Beneath the usual whirl of fans, the steady chug of the humidifier and the nearly subliminal hum of the lights was the intermittent thump of attitude thrusters and a chorus of pings and popping noises.

Baker jerked his head back so that Jackson's next blow missed; she swung half-way around with the momentum. "What," he said, so full of fear that he thought for a moment he would start to cry. He swallowed something salty and said, "What have you done?"

"You work it out," she said, and let go of his wrist and turned her back on him.

It took him less than a second to call up the data. The scow was in orbit around Phoebe, docked with its chain of cargo pods and slowly rotating in barbecue mode.

A thumbnail picture showed the patchwork of the lit-

the moon's tightly curving globe. Only 200 kilometres in diameter, it was a captured unmodified primitive object, mostly carbonaceous material mixed with water ice, almost entirely grown over with vacuum organisms which used the energy of sunlight to turn methane ice and carbonaceous tars formed five billion years ago, when the Solar System had first condensed, into useful carbon compounds. The patches were of all shapes but only four muted colours: orange-brown, reddish-brown, sooty black, mottled grey. Phoebe was like a dented and battered patchwork ball or a gigantic version of the four-colour map problem, curving away sharply in every direction.

Another thumbnail showed Berry floating in faint red light, half-filling the scow's water tank. An air mask was clamped over his face. Baker had objected to Jackson's idea on hygiene grounds, but she had pointed out that the water was recycled anyway, and the filter system could easily be rerouted to clean the water coming out of the tank as well as that going in. Berry seemed to be asleep, curled up like a huge late-term embryo, the umbilical cord of airline and nutrient feed connected to his face rather than his belly, hands clasped piously under his chins, a continuous chain of bubbles trickling from the vent of his air mask.

Baker clicked everything off. Jackson was hunched up at the far end of the cramped lifestream, an arm's length away. She had livid marks on her throat and deep scratches on her arms were still oozing blood into the air. She said, "You almost died. Your net shut down your vagus reflexes when I hacked it. And when I tried to revive you, you tried to kill me. Don't you know what they did to you?"

"You shouldn't have messed with it," Baker said.

"I did it to free you!"

Jackson's face was pinched white, harsh and old-looking; only her bright blue eyes seemed alive. She shuddered all over and said more quietly, "They made you into a slave. A *thing*."

They had both had military neural nets installed when they had been inducted, but Baker's net had been considerably upgraded after his accident; it was now more like a symbiont than a machine enhancement of his nervous system. When Jackson had jacked into it, she had been able to access only a few of its functions. She had got the ship up into orbit, and docked manually with the train of cargo pods, but she hadn't been able to activate the flight plan he'd filed. And when she had tried to hack into its root directory, his net had easily repelled her efforts and had triggered a number of defence routines.

Baker said, "Why are you doing this? Aren't we friends?"

"Because I'm tired of giving blow-jobs to Berry. Because I can't bear to see an old comrade turned into a zombie so dumb he doesn't even know what he is. Because I was in prison in Angola for ten years and I'd sooner die than go back."

Half of the Redeemers' business was running the port. The other half was running the correctional facilities for the Saturn system – the vacuum farms. Angola was the worst of them; eight out of ten prisoners died before completing their sentence.

Baker said, "Well, I did wonder about the tattoos. What were you in for?"

"Just load and run the flight plan," Jackson said, and smiled bloodlessly. "Okay, maybe I got greedy and fucked up. I need you, and I won't let you back out."

Baker said, "I wasn't your first choice of pilot, was I? You had an agreement with someone else, and I bet that's why you were in the pilots' canteen. But then you saw me, and thought you could make a better deal."

"I still rescued you," she said.

"How much were you going to get? From the first deal."

"It was the same as the one we made, except I was to get the 20-per-cent cut. But that's blown away. We're in this together or we're both dead, and Berry too. Your call."

It might be a bluff, but Jackson didn't look like the kind of person who would start something she couldn't finish. Baker pulled down the flight plan, checked it over out of habit, and activated it.

The rumble of the scow's motor filled the life system. Acceleration gripped Baker; he drifted gently onto the padding at the rear of the cabin. Jackson hooked an arm around a staple and stared at him from what was now definitely the ceiling. And in the tank, Berry woke up amidst clashing pressure waves which distorted the red light into clashing lines and sheets and plaintively asked what was going on.

Neither Baker nor Jackson slept during the 65 hours of the flight. Their military nets could keep them awake for more than a week, switching consciousness back and forth between the right and left hemispheres of their brains. Sometimes Baker would feel a little sluggish and his saliva would taste strange, but there were no other side effects.

Jackson didn't stay mad at him, but she remained wary. It wasn't his fault that she had activated the defence routines. They were there to protect the collective's investment. He told her this, and that he was happy and liked the life he had been given, but it only provoked a torrent of abuse. He wished that he had his sidekick to explain things, to help sort out the muddle, but Jackson had suppressed it – he had the horrible feeling that she had in fact erased it. When he asked her about this, she said that it was time that he started thinking for himself. He could never be the man he'd been when she had known him, but he could be his own man now.

She did unbend enough to tell him a little of her life. While he had been drifting in the crippled singleship, neither alive nor dead, she had used her sign-off pay to start up a haulage company. When that had failed, out-competed by rail guns, she had joined a collective long enough to know that it wasn't for her, and then had become a smuggler, intercepting packages of forbidden technologies in the rings while on apparently innocent cargo runs. An industrial spy had broken up the cartel she had mostly worked for, and someone in the cartel had given her up to protect himself, and that was how she had ended up in the vacuum farms of Phoebe.

She was still bitter about it. During the Quiet War, the Outer System colonists, split into more than a dozen rival enclaves, had hardly been able to fight back at all. In only three months, their infrastructures had been so devastated that they had been forced to surrender their hegemony. But what had happened since made you wonder who had really won after all, Jack-

son said. The tweaks had the upper hand in the Outer System, even if their various assemblies, moots, councils, conclaves and congresses were now in principle subservient to the Three Powers Occupying Force. Despite incentives and tax breaks, the various emigration schemes sponsored by the victors of the Quiet War had mostly failed; new settlers couldn't compete with established co-operatives and collectives, and unless they signed away their right to return to Earth in exchange for gengineering they were not allowed to have children and tended to die young of problems associated with living in microgravity. Meanwhile, the central administration of the Outer System was falling apart as adapted colonists began to spread through the thousands of dirty snowballs and rocks of the Kuiper Belt. There was talk of another war, one in which Jackson wouldn't be able to fight. She was too old and slow for combat now; she had been sidelined by history.

Baker listened patiently to her rants. He tried to talk with Berry, too, but Jackson had set up a feed of lemon-flavoured alcohol and the man was only partly coherent. In one of his more lucid moments, he said, "You shouldn't go near my mother. She's dangerous. All of her are dangerous."

"You mean she has other children?"

"You could call them that," Berry said. "They're crazy bad." His voice, muffled by the airmask, sounded as if it was coming from the bottom of a well.

"How many brothers and sisters do you have?"

"It isn't like that. Alder would know, I guess... They look after me, always have, so maybe they're not so bad. Not to me. They saved me other times..."

Baker felt a faint stirring, as if his sidekick was about to waken. He wished it would, if only to say that it told him so. When nothing happened, he said, "Other times? What happened, Berry?"

Berry was silent for a while. Then he said, "I should get out of here now. My skin is all puffy."

Baker tried to imagine what the lifesystem would be like with 160 kilos of dripping wet Berry crammed into it. He said, "You hang in there. Play your sagas."

"It isn't the same," Berry said. "The emulation in this system is horrible. When can you get me back to the hotel?"

"Well, I'm not sure. Soon."

"I'd like margarita. That always goes down smooth."

"Maybe you should stop drinking."

"What's the point of stopping? Get me some margarita and I might help you out."

Jackson was amused by Baker's attempts to talk with Berry. She said that you couldn't get any sense out of the man. His brain had been fried in alcohol, most of the switches jammed open or jammed closed, whole areas dead and blasted. Like a low-grade robot, he could follow his routines, but had trouble with anything outside them.

"You want to know anything, you ask me," she said.

Baker thought that he had already learnt something useful from Berry. He said, "What will happen after we insert into orbit?"

"I'll tell you on a need-to-know basis, just like the old times."

But the old times were gone for ever. His original self must have loved her fiercely for a residue of that love to have survived death, and Baker, who was vicariously

fascinated by other peoples' lives, and watched a lot of the old psychodramas when he wasn't working, thought wistfully that once upon a time they must have been like Romeo and Juliet. But whatever they'd once been, that was then and this was now.

The scow accelerated for more than 40 hours. The idea was to come in on a fast, short trajectory, decelerating hard at the last moment. Baker spent much of that time watching the view, a thumbnail of the lifesystem in one corner to let him keep a eye on Jackson – he was worried that she might suddenly try something stupid.

Phoebe's orbit was not only retrograde, but inclined to the equatorial plane of Saturn. As the scow drove inwards, the entire system was spread out ahead and below, nine major moons and more than a hundred smaller bodies, Saturn a pale half-disc at the centre, circled by his rings like an exquisite bit of jewellery.

Baker never tired of this privileged view. He spent a lot of time watching it while working through his options. He wasn't as brain-damaged as Jackson thought, and the enhancements to his net gave him a lot of computational power. He worked up several scenarios and played the simulations over and over, finally choosing the simplest one with a sense of doors closing irrecoverably behind him. He wondered if Jackson had inserted a parasitic eavesdropper into his net; if she had, she gave no sign that she knew what he was planning.

As Saturn grew closer, the ring system began to resolve details in the sunlit arc that swept out beyond the planet: two unequal halves separated by the gap of the Cassini division, each half further divided into fine parallel bands, with dark irregular spokes in the bright B ring that could be seen to rotate if watched long enough.

Then the motor cut out and they were in freefall again. There were only a couple of hours in turnover. Jackson spent much of them supervising the decoupling of the scow from the cargo train. Normally it would recouple on the other end of the train, thrusters pointing ahead for deceleration. But Jackson's manual link closed down halfway through the manoeuvre and the scow fired off several orientation bursts, turned end-for-end and immediately lit its main engines in a brief burn. At the same time, the thrusters of the cargo train started to fire.

Berry started complaining over the link; Jackson snarled at him to shut up and was suddenly right in Baker's face, swarming down the lifesystem cabin against the pull of the thrust and grabbing his right wrist. A trojan horse smashed its way into his net, spilling voracious subroutines. For a panicky minute he was deaf and dumb and blind – it was like being raped from the inside out.

Light and sound came back. Baker discovered that he was in freefall again. Jackson had shoved away from him and was studying him intently, her blue eyes cold behind the tendrils of red hair that drifted loose over her face.

Baker closed up all the indices and files she'd pulled open and said shakily, "You shouldn't have done that."

"Christ, they really did a number on you, Baker. You're not a man any more. You're a bundle of routines. You're a lapdog. This is your chance to get free of the leash, and you're fucking it up."

Baker's net was suppressing adrenalin production; otherwise he would have been trembling with flight

reaction and stinking up the lifesystem with sweat. He said, "We're in this together. I've accepted that. I thought it would be a good idea to dump the cargo in a high orbit. Makes us more manoeuvrable and saves reaction mass. We'll get there earlier than the flight plan allows, so we can surprise Berry's mother."

It was the best lie he had been able to come up with. He sipped at a bulb of orange-flavoured glucose solution and watched her work it through. At last, she said, "I know you're trying to fuck me over, but I can't figure out how, not yet. But I will, and then I'll know what to do with you. Meanwhile, climb into your pressure suit. There's a chance that Berry's mother might have changed her defence systems since he left."

"I thought you got the codes from him. And she knows we're bringing him here."

"The codes are 20 years old, and she might not believe us. We've got 15 minutes before the main burn, so get moving."

They only just made it.

The scow, decelerating, fell behind the cargo train. The string of half-silvered beads dwindled against the sweep of the rings, vanishing into the planet's shadow as the scow swung in around the night side. Vast lightning storms illuminated sluggish bands of storm systems that could have swallowed Earth without a ripple. Then the rings appeared, a silver arc ahead of the dawning diamond point of the sun. The scow's motor rumbled continuously, decelerating at just over one gravity. Baker was heavier than he had been for years. Lying flat on the padding of the lifesystem, he tried to find a comfortable position within his pressure suit to wait it out, but there always seemed to be some seam or wrinkle digging into him. Jackson lay beside him, her ungloved right hand holding his ungloved left so that she could access the ship through his net. They lay there like spent lovers.

"Seems hard to remember how we stood this on Earth," Baker said at one point. "I almost envy Berry, floating in that tank."

"Just keep quiet," Jackson said. "I'm watching everything. If something goes wrong, you're toast."

She didn't say it with much conviction, Baker thought. For the first time, he felt that he might have a chance to win back from this. It was clear that she hadn't been able to work out what he'd done. He felt pity for her – she was out-of-date, left behind by the accelerating changes that were sweeping through the Outer System. She should have returned to Earth; out here, the aggression which had helped win the Quiet War was not a survival trait. Individualism counted for nothing in the Outer System. To survive, you had to commit yourself to helping others, who in turn would help you.

Baker said, "What's wrong? You said you remembered how good I was. I'm even better now."

"I remember you always thought you were a hotshot, but didn't have much to back it up. You were a company man, Baker, even when you were in the service. You were always happiest following orders. You had no initiative. That's one thing about you that hasn't changed."

"Nothing you can say can hurt me more than what you tried to do to me," Baker said, with a fair imitation of wounded pride, thinking that *her* initiative had got her into prison, and now into this. He pulled down the

view to shut her out.

The rings spanned the curve of the planet in a thousand shades of grey and brown and white, casting a shadow across the bulge of its equator. The scow was coming in at a narrow angle above the plane of the rings, and they spread to port like a highway a million lanes wide. Zooming in with the scow's telescope, Baker could see the seemingly solid plane break apart in lanes of flecks that grew into rocks and bergs flashing in the sunlight as they tumbled, a storm of motes forever falling around the planet.

The scow plunged stern-first towards the gap beyond the outer edge of the narrow F ring. Jackson started a looped broadcast of the code she had dug out of Berry. Their target was still around the curve of the planet, coming towards them out of night; they'd rendezvous with it just at its dawn. Baker wanted to look for the cargo train, but wasn't sure that he could do it without Jackson catching on.

"I was wondering," he said, after a while, "what you'll do if this works out."

"That's none of your fucking business."

"We might not survive it."

"I intend to. You could have set yourself free, Baker."

"Things have changed."

"This is the frontier, Baker. It's far from the antfarms of Earth. It's where people can walk tall and make their fortunes if they have the intelligence and the backbone."

"Or end in the vacuum farms."

"I had some bad luck. I'm going to turn that around. You might be content to give up your free will to a bunch of farmers who sit inside rocks like bugs in a bad apple. Well, I'm not."

She said more, but Baker tuned it out. The scow was just about to begin its final course correction. He patched telescope scans into a 360-degree perspective. The rings stretched away ahead and behind, flattened into a narrow line that bisected the sky. A single speck was bracketed ahead: their target.

Janus was roughly the same size as Phoebe, an irregular body like the profile of a fist. It was pockmarked with craters, most eroded by billions of years of micrometeorite sleet and further softened by patches of vacuum organism growth. One small circular crater had been tented over, and shone greenly with internal lights. There was a ring of silver around it. The scow spotted one of the defence drones a hundred kilometres out and presented Baker with a grainy image of the tiny, deadly thing: a slim body less than two metres long, with a flat radar dish at one end and the swollen bowl of an oversized motor at the other. No radar probed the scow; nothing moved to intercept it. The broadcast code must be working.

The scow shuddered, spinning this way and that, making a series of short burns before finally shutting down its motor. Now it was falling in the same orbit as the little moon, barely 20 kilometres away.

Jackson started what seemed to be a one-sided conversation – she had made contact with someone on Janus, it seemed, but she wouldn't allow Baker to switch into the channel.

"I have him right here," she said, "just like I told you. You must know he's aboard – that's why I could shut

down your defence drones. Don't try and target me manually, the ship will blow up if radar locks on it. Because he asked me to, don't let's go into all that again. Well, I expect that he misses you all. Yes, I can bring evidence, but it might be easier if you came up here, or I landed the ship. Well, okay, that's fine by me too. Creepy little fucker," she added, turning to Baker.

"Can you really blow up the ship?"

"Only if it's absolutely necessary."

"That was Berry's mother you were talking with?"

"Some kind of agent, I think. It wants me to go down there with evidence I brought Berry back."

Jackson sealed up her pressure suit but did not go out through the airlock; instead, she opened an internal access hatch and plunged into the water tank. Berry was supine. She had added a relaxant to his alcohol mix. Baker watched as she snipped off the little finger from Berry's right hand and came back out.

"It has to be fresh," she said, grinning at Baker through her helmet's visor. She was pumped up with excitement. "That way she'll know we're not kidding. You're not going to give me any trouble, are you?"

"Maybe you had better tell me what you've thought of."

"We're going down together. And if I see any sign that the ship is moving out of orbit, I'll blow it."

"I should stay here with Berry."

"And have you swing the ship around and torch me?"

"I wouldn't do that. I'm in this with you."

"You'd better be, because you're going to be my backup. They're expecting one person. You'll be a surprise. They won't know who you are or what you'll be doing while I walk in there."

They used a little jet unit to pull them across, touching down two kilometres from the tented crater, which was somewhere beyond the close, sharply-curved horizon. Except for his annual safety certification exercises, Baker had hardly ever done any vacuum work. His p-suit was intelligent and responsive, but a residual stiffness blunted his reflexes; he let go a moment too soon and tumbled end for end when he touched down on the little moon's surface.

He tumbled a fair way – in Janus's microgravity, he could bounce a couple of hundred metres off the surface with the gentlest of kicks. At last the suit fired a grapple and he slewed to a halt with a cloud of dust raining straight down all around. He was at the edge of a dense field of tall black blades that sloped away to the close horizon. Some reached up to four metres; all grew from thick rhizomes that snaked half-buried through the dusty regolith; all had turned the flat surfaces of their blades towards the sun's yellow spark.

Jackson threw a camo cloth over the jet unit and crept towards Baker on her belly, supple as a snake in her yellow p-suit. She checked him over and began to assemble a hollow tube and a scaffold cradle from components she had strapped to her back-pack.

"What are you doing?"

"It's amazing what you can get in the way of surplus weaponry, if you have the credit. This is a missile launcher. The Europeans made them to shoot down drones like the ones we operated, only they didn't have time to deploy them before the hydrogen bomb broke open the crust. I paid for this through Berry's room service. It fires up to ten smart micro-missiles, but I only

need two. One is aimed at the scow, the other at the dome over the horizon."

"Ah. I thought you were joking about blowing up the ship."

Jackson said flatly, "I don't joke about business."

She started to adjust the angle of the tube by minute increments, finally sitting back in a squat. "It's running, ready to go in three hours. Try and move it now and the charge will explode. Try and rip out the chip that controls it – same thing. The only way to stop it is to use a code. You think I'm a fuck-up, but I know what I'm doing here."

Baker couldn't see Jackson's face because the sun was reflecting off the gold-tinted visor of her helmet, but he could imagine her tigerish grin. He said, "I don't doubt it."

"You stay right there. I'll be telling them that you'll fire the mortar at any sign of trouble, so don't stray. And remember that I'm linked to the ship just like you. Try anything – especially try and close down my link – and I'll blow her. Sit tight. Enjoy the view. I'll be back soon."

Baker sat tight, watching Saturn's crescent slowly wax above the sharp, irregular edge of the horizon. Like almost all of Saturn's moons, Janus was tidally locked, and kept one face permanently turned towards its primary. Sri Hong-Owen had sited her home at the edge of sub-Saturnian hemisphere; Saturn stood permanently at the horizon, his rings arching beyond his banded crescent like the string of a drawn bow – he dominated half the sky, shedding a bilious light over the pockmarked slope. Janus was so small that wherever you looked the ground appeared to slope away – Baker felt that he was hugging the top of a hill that was plunging towards Saturn's storms, a hill studded with half-buried boulders of all sizes which cast multicoloured shadows. In the other direction, the outer ring system scratched a thin arch across the width of the sky, with several of the moons bright against a dusting of stars. There was Dione, which had its own satellite trailing at 60 degrees of arc in the same orbital path; there was the tiny crescent of Titan, lit not only by the Sun but by the terraforming fusion lamps hung in equatorial orbit.

Baker wondered what it would be like when Janus was overtaken by its co-orbital moon, Epimetheus. Passing only 50 kilometres away, Epimetheus would eclipse Saturn and exchange a fraction of its momentum with Janus; the two moons would swap orbits and Janus would slowly accelerate away in the lower orbit. The orbital exchange happened every four years, and was not a stable configuration; in slightly under ten million years the two moons would collide, and it was thought that the fragments would eventually coalesce into a single body.

He thought his plan through again. With the insurance of the cargo train, he was pretty sure that he could get out of this alive. The rest was as imponderable as ever, but he was confident that he could make some friends here. That was what he was good at, after all. Of course, he'd underestimated Jackson, and it was only pure dumb luck that she hadn't upgraded her net – otherwise he was pretty sure that she would have disposed of him as soon as she had control of the scow. But Jackson wasn't the problem now. He was pretty sure that she would be killed as soon as she walked into the habitat.

Although it certainly increased his chance of survival, part of him – the fragmented bits of his old self – wished that he'd warned her.

The p-suit's lifestream made comforting hums and soft hisses; it was like being inside a tent exactly his size.

Baker broke radio silence to try and talk with Berry, but the man was gurgling inside his mask, drunk or asleep, and wouldn't answer.

He tried that counting trick: *one potato, two potato, three potato, four*. Tested it against the system clock of his net, tried different intonations, couldn't get it to come out right. Maybe it was just a story Jackson had spun to draw him in. It didn't matter. He didn't need dumb tricks like that, not any more.

Time passed. Baker had always been calm in the squeeze of danger – to his way of thinking, there was no sense in getting caught up in useless speculation, it was best to face any situation with an uncluttered mind. In any case, there was nothing he could do until either Jackson came back or Berry's mother came for him. He set up a couple of alarms on his p-suit's system and fell asleep.

And woke an hour later to find four pressure-suited figures kneeling by him, visors blankly reflecting the grey-brown moonscape. They were as small as children. A fifth figure was examining Jackson's missile launcher.

Baker tried to sit up, and discovered that his suit was bound with a thousand tough, tightly-wrapped fibres. He squashed the first tremors of alarm and said as calmly as he could, "There's a couple of things you should know."

The ring of silver around the tented crater was a plantation of things like flowers, tough wiry stalks five metres tall rising straight out of dusty ice, each bearing single big white dish-shaped bloom with a black cylinder protruding from its centre. The dishes were all turned in one direction, towards the setting sun. It was pitch black beneath the packed dishes, but Baker's captors carried him at the same fast gliding gait with which they'd crossed the open ground.

Just as he was carried out of the far side of the plantation, Baker thought he saw a flash at the horizon, and wondered if that had been the missile launcher. Then he and his captors plunged down a steep terraced slope, following a path sketched in dabs of green fox-fire. Baker didn't ask where they were taking him. He was just grateful that so far he had not been killed.

The slope became a tunnel, hung from floor to ceiling with a thousand stiff black curtains that must have formed a pressure lock, because the tunnel suddenly opened up at the lip of a huge bowl of greenery under a thousand brilliant lamps, with flocks of what looked like birds floating lazily at different layers in the air, Saturn a blank-faced giant peering in at the construction diamond tent which capped the vast space.

Baker's pressure-suited captors dropped him at the edge of the bowl and threw themselves over the drop, bouncing like balls from terrace to terrace and finally vanishing into a stand of tree ferns. Baker's bonds slowly dissolved, snapping apart like brittle elastic as he picked himself up.

A woman was moving towards him through the air above the green gulf, sitting on a throne borne up by what looked like cherubs.



She was not Sri Hong-Owen but one of her daughters. She was young, golden-skinned and unselfconsciously naked. She had a tweak's etiolated build, her long arms and legs skinny but supple, her breasts no more than enlarged nipples on her prominent ribcage. A cloud of black hair floated around her narrow face.

When Baker asked her name, she smiled and said that no names were needed here, where all were one mind, one flesh. He asked then where her mother was, and the golden-skinned woman told him that she had moved on, which at first Baker took to mean *died*.

"Alder descended to the Earth to continue our mother's work there," the woman said, "and Berry went his own way. He is only our half-brother, and is weak-minded, but we love him anyway. Our mother would have killed him, we think, but she no longer needs to make small decisions like that, and we decided to show mercy."

"How many are you?"

Baker had unlatched the helmet of his p-suit and stood with it tucked under his arm, like an old-fashioned knight in front of his enthroned queen. The cherubs had flown away – they had little patience, the woman had said when they left, being full of the joy of life lived moment to moment.

"There are more than enough of us to deal with you or anyone else who tries to invade our kingdom," she told Baker now. "We have killed many in the last 20 years – spies, pirates, adventurers, the merely curious. But you are the first to think of kidnapping Berry, and you are the first to threaten our mother. How did you know?"

"Luck, I guess," Baker said, wondering what he was supposed to have guessed.

The woman leaned forward, gazing intently at him through her floating tangle of black hair. "Berry is not dead."

Her gaze compelled. Baker said, "No. No, not when I left him."

"Then you are luckier than you know," the woman said.

"What about Jackson?"

"Was that her name?"

"You killed her, didn't you? You should know she aimed a missile at this place."

"We dealt with it."

"Ah. I thought I saw an explosion."

"The one who tried to disarm it was killed."

"So you killed Jackson in return."

"No, we killed the woman because she threatened us. Any of us would sacrifice our lives for the good of the clade, but all of us would die to save our mother. We love her more than life itself. You should know that we are tracking the cargo train and have calculated its trajectory."

When Baker had briefly wrested control of the scow from Jackson, he had sent the cargo train on a trajectory that would end in a collision with Epimetheus after three orbits of Saturn, less than 20 hours now. He said, "I was going to tell you about that. I don't mean any harm by it. I want to be friends. The cargo train – it's just insurance, that's all."

The woman made no gesture, but children appeared at various levels of the burgeoning greenery. No, not children: they were naked creatures the same size as his pressure-suited captors, so pale and skinny that they seemed partly transparent, like certain deep-sea creatures. They were

quite sexless. Their heads were small and wedge-shaped, sloping straight back from skin-covered dimples where their eyes should have been; their ears flared out like bat's wings; their hands had only three fingers, spaced like a crane's grab. Four of them gripped the arms of Baker's p-suit with implacable strength.

"We will kill you slowly for your presumption," the woman said, "and our defence drones will destroy the cargo train."

Baker said, "I don't think you want to do that. If it's destroyed, the debris will still hit and do just as much harm, but if you leave it be, I can change its orbit once we've made a deal."

The woman shrugged. "It is unlikely that the impact will hurt our mother, for most of her is far underground. But it will damage her energy-gathering systems, and we cannot allow even that. You will change its orbit now."

Baker said stubbornly, "We can make a deal. That's why I'm here."

"No," the golden-skinned woman said serenely. "No bargains. Change the orbit of the cargo train and we may let you leave. Otherwise we will keep you here, alive and in great pain."

"You didn't kill me," Baker said. "Of course you want to bargain. I want to set up a trading agreement between your clade and my collective. You must have plenty of biological novelties, for instance. In exchange, we can supply you with trace elements, or anything else you might need. I did a little research and I know you deal exclusively with the private citizens who bankrolled this experiment. I bet my collective can offer you better supply contracts. And we can guarantee confidentiality."

"There will be no trade," the woman said. "We need nothing. Our mother made this garden. It is all we need. You will do as we ask."

"I have to be on the scow to do it," Baker said, "so you'll have to let me go anyway. There's plenty of time. I can show you the figures on the trade my collective does with the Titan terraforming project. Think it over. I mean no harm to your mother. I didn't know she was on Epimetheus. I thought she was here."

"She is not *on* Epimetheus," the woman said, "she is *becoming* Epimetheus. Think what you will do. I will return soon."

Cherubs whirled down and lifted the chair and the woman into the air. As she dwindled away, the workers released Baker and vanished into the greenery with unnerving swift silence.

The golden-skinned woman did not return for many hours. Baker wasn't worried; he was sure that she was discussing the offer with her mother, and the longer it took the more likely it was that he could hook them. He found the airlock, but the black sheets had stiffened and would not let him pass. A little way beyond, at the foot of a steep vine-covered cliff, a flash of bright yellow caught his attention. It was Jackson's p-suit helmet. The visor was cracked around a burn hole; the padding inside was crusted with drying blood.

Baker cradled it, tears pricking at his eyes; although he had not loved her, he had loved the idea of remembering that he had once loved her, and what he was mourning now was that lost part of his life. She had not

understood that when she had tried to manipulate him; she had not really understood much of what she had done. The only thing she had been right about was that ordinary humans had no place in the Outer System: here was the proof.

He dropped the helmet and turned back to explore the rim of the freefall jungle bowl. The lush green thickets were full of strange creatures: things like snakes, but with narrow human heads and pale human skin; little black-furred tarsiers with microcephalic human faces; white worms working like mobile fingers through the crumbling soil. The things Baker had thought were birds were more like black-furred bats, with leathery wings as wide as his outstretched arms; when he climbed out along the smooth limb of a tree above the bowl of the jungle a flock of them wheeled and dive-bombed him, spattering him with their dung.

Baker laughed and retreated, crashing unhandily through thick foliage in his p-suit. He was not afraid of anything here. He controlled the cargo train: he had the upper hand. He had thought to threaten Sri Hong-Owen with the destruction of her experimental sites, and although he didn't understand what the woman had told him, he was certain that his bargaining position was even stronger than he had hoped. His sidekick had been wrong after all. Everything was going to work out. Except for Jackson, of course. It was a pity about Jackson, but after she tried to cut him out of the deal he really had had no choice but to let her walk unknowingly to her own death.

At last, the golden-skinned woman returned, borne as before through the air on a chair sustained by cherubs. Workers stepped out of the greenery and stood on either side of her chair as the cherubs set it down and whirled away.

"I hope we can talk," Baker said.

"We have agreed to tell you about us," the woman said. "Listen."

Sri Hong-Owen wanted to become truly immortal, the woman said. She had used cloning as a first step, although she knew that it would not be enough. Clones are exact genetic copies, but personality is determined by a combination of genes, environment and experience. A clone would have to have been subjected to every single one of her own experiences to become a perfect copy. Even so, she experimented with the effects of various types of memory downloads and artificial-reality scenarios on the personalities of female clones, and then she had created the clade and its habitat, and given it over to the charge of her daughter clones. The clade valued knowledge, not things. Its treasure store was in its self-regulating ecosystem and the genetic diversity it had fashioned from a genome library derived from a few plants and microorganisms and from Sri Hong-Owen herself; every animal in the habitat was derived from her by engineering and forced evolution. Given the right conditions, the clade could persist forever.

Meanwhile, Sri Hong-Owen reshaped herself.

She developed vacuum organisms which turned sunlight into electrical energy with almost one-hundred-per-cent efficiency – the ring of dish flowers around the habitat were an early prototype. They were forming a

blanket across the surface of Epimetheus, and Sri Hong-Owen's modified body was growing through the moon's icy crust like blue mould through cheese. It was already the largest organism in the Solar System, larger even than the mycelial mats which underlay Earth's temperate forests, and which she now somewhat resembled. Copies of her original body were cached here and there in that mass, and there were more than a hundred copies of her brain, all sharing the same sensory inputs, the same thoughts. They were as alike as possible. Eventually the mycelium would completely embrace the moon. It would grow thrusters which would subtly alter the moon's orbit, slingshotting it repeatedly through Saturn's gravity well until it gained enough velocity to escape to the stars.

"Probably Vega," the golden-skinned woman told Baker. "There's a ring of debris around Vega twice the size of our solar system, millions of comets and planetoids and asteroids. She will fill it with clades like ours, and then move on to other systems where planets failed to form. She is the first real transhuman, but there will be others – those who sponsored her work, to begin with."

Baker smiled. He did not believe half of what he had been told. He said, "If she is truly immortal then she must value her life immensely."

"What are you to her? She could fill the galaxy. In time, she could fill a million galaxies. Planets are unnecessary. We have evolved beyond planets. We have evolved beyond the human form. We can make ourselves over into a thousand kinds of organism, all fitter for life in space than mere humans. The tweaks are a first step, lungfish on the shore of space. We will go much further."

"My collective has already made over a tented crater on Rhea, much as this one has been transformed. Other collectives are making homes in planetoids, mining comet heads... There are many different ways of making a living, and no need at all to depend on trade with anyone on Earth. Trade with us instead. If you had time to look at those figures –"

"All of you are still human," the woman said. "We have evolved beyond that."

"She's right," someone else said, and a second golden-skinned woman came into the clearing with an elegant motion that was half-walking, half-swimming. She held something between her small breasts with both hands.

"You've decided," Baker said. "That's good."

"We've decided," the woman said, and released what she held.

It flew straight at Baker on a blur of membranous wings, a tiny bat with a wasp's long abdomen. He tried to knock it out of the air but it was too fast and his pressure suit slowed him. It dodged his clumsy blow and caught at his hair with its claws. Something sank into his scalp, pushing between the sutures of his skull, and black pain swept the world away.

When it came back, the two golden-skinned women were looking down at him. Baker pushed up and gingerly touched the top of his head; hundreds of hair-thin wires with sticky-tagged ends came loose, slowly falling to the ground around him. He said, "What did you do?"

"Evolution is cruel," the first woman said. "Those

forms which are less successful will die. Perhaps we will keep some of you, out of sentiment. And Baker, while he lives, needs help, of course.”

“I’m not sure I understand,” Baker said. He felt quite calm, as if he had entered an artificial reality and could leave any time he wanted. “I thought evolution was all about change, but you do not want to change.”

Suddenly he felt his sidekick at his back and a warning twinge in his head like a cold needle in his core. Ordinarily he would have welcomed its return, but there seemed to be something wrong with it; it was fierce and strong and silent.

He said, “You did something to me, didn’t you? Something with those wires, something to my net.”

The second woman said, “We are a new kind of evolution. The body changes at will, and the mind lives on.”

“Tell me what you did!”

“After a little while,” the first woman said, “you won’t ever worry about it.”

Baker said, “You want me think like you? Is that it? Listen, you can’t last forever in isolation. People need other people.”

“That is why we will send you back,” the first woman said. “You can only think in the old way. Although we love him dearly, that was always Berry’s trouble.”

Then the sidekick seized Baker. He couldn’t move. His body felt bloated, unmanageable, fiery hot, a pupa melting and changing inside the carapace of the p-suit.

The wires had downloaded new programs into his net and reactivated his sidekick; now his sidekick was changing him. Parts of his personality fell away, falling from his mind into darkness as icebergs calve from a glacier.

At last the work was done and the world came back to him. His sidekick was at his back, stronger than ever, his mentor and his friend.

They all gathered to watch him go, workers, cherubs, human-skinned snakes and crabs, naked monkey-things which tended the gardens, all one family, one flesh, one thought, one clade.

“You are one of us now,” they said. “A different flesh but one of us. Our faithful servant. You will divert the cargo train because you know that no harm must come to our mother. You will guard our brother now and forever.”

He did what they wanted.

He was one of them.

His collective finally found him on Dione. He and Berry were staying in the only hotel in a raw construction town, the first stage of an ambitious plan to tent the Latium Chasma, the fissure which cut a deep groove across the northern half of the sub-Saturnian hemisphere. The hotel could not supply the kind of luxury that Berry was used to; after only a few days he told Baker that he wanted to move on.

Baker was returning from the port. He always transacted business in person; even deeply encrypted phone lines were not to be trusted. He had arranged transport to one of the garden habitats that orbited Titan, a tourist place where people went to use telepresence to explore the storms which were resurfacing the giant moon. He was sure that Berry would like it; gardens reminded him of the happy days of his childhood, in the garden of his mother.

They jumped into Baker’s capsule just before it pulled out of the station, a young woman and an older man. The young woman wanted to know if he recognized her. “We slept together to seal the contract,” she said, her eyes searching his face. “You were always my favourite. You must remember.”

Baker tried to be polite. “I do not know you,” he lied. “I am sorry.”

The young woman touched the man’s arm.

“Ralf is a lawyer. We filed a bond here. If you need privacy to talk we can provide it. We know you logged a flight with two passengers. One was an old friend of yours. Vera Flamillion Jackson. We know where you went, but we don’t know what happened. Please tell me. Whatever happened to you can be reversed, I’m sure of it.”

“I don’t think so. You want your slave back. Don’t deny that you think of him as your property. Well, he isn’t. He is one of us, now.”

And so on, a tide of anger rolling over Baker, submerging him so completely that he no longer knew if he or the sidekick was speaking. He came to himself in the atrium of Berry’s hotel suite. The entry phone was flashing but he ignored it.

“Well, it’s time we moved anyway,” he said to the air, as he moved through the rooms to the private pool where Berry floated.

The sidekick was fading at his back, as beneficent as the warmth of the sun; before it vanished it told him with approval that he had done well. And then he saw Berry, floating pink and naked in steaming water amongst palmettoes and bamboos, a tray of food on his hairless chest, sucking on a drink bulb, and the unfortunate incident didn’t matter any more.

Berry spat the straw from his mouth and said, “You’ve been away. I don’t like it when you’re away.”

“I’ve arranged a new place for us.”

“Oh, that. Good. Can’t stay in one place too long. That’s the secret.”

“Do you think she might need us one day? Do you think we might be allowed to return?”

Berry bent his head and sucked up the last of the margarita mix with a rattling noise. When he looked up, there were tears swelling in his eyes. He said, “We’re nothing to her now. We’re too human. You’re here to serve me. By serving me you serve the clade. That’s all you need to know. Now help me out. My skin’s wrinkling.”

“Of course,” Baker said, and went to get the oils and unguents, filled with boundless unqualified love for his master.

Paul J. McAuley recently completed the third volume of his “Confluence” trilogy – although that book will not be out until next year. He is now contemplating a new novel. His last three appearances in *Interzone* were with “The True History of Dr Pretorius” (issue 98), “All Tomorrow’s Parties” (issue 119) and “The Secret of My Success” (issue 131). He lives in London.

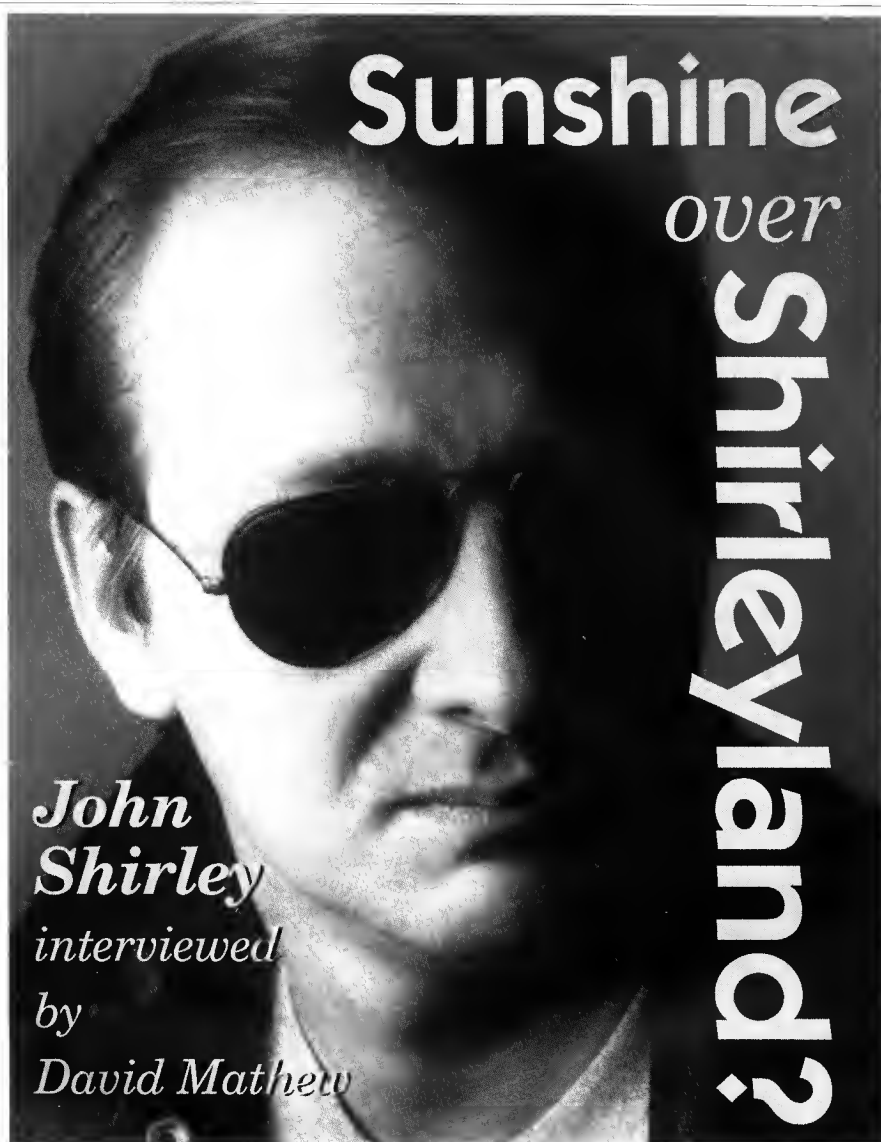
Originally, I was going to call this piece "Shirleyland," after William Gibson's overall title for John Shirley's work, as written in the introduction for the collection, *Heatseeker* (1988). By the end of the interview, however, there was a hint (just a hint, mind) of contentment in Shirley's words, so I introduced a change in the emotional weather. But the question mark still seemed relevant.

John Shirley published his first novel, *Transmaniacon*, in 1974. Since then he has published 13 novels (and others under a pseudonym, D. B. Drumm), four collections of short stories and has written numerous screenplays, some of which have been based on the work of other writers. Having published the first novel, Shirley immediately veered off in a different direction (and some would say, has continued to do so ever since); he produced a series of high-energy contributions to the fields of science fiction and horror. Not that his work is easily definable as either: Shirley is held up as an example of one who was ahead of his time, but who managed to influence others. *City Come A-Walkin'* (1980) is regarded as an important prologue in the story of cyberpunk, and rumour has it that horror novelist Nancy A. Collins was inspired by the explicit sexual themes in *Dracula in Love* (1983).

Yet, despite this reputation as an honorary godfather of generic extremes, Shirley is only halfway through his 40s. Has he experienced a mid-life crisis? I would say yes; and that it started at the age of 15, or thereabouts. But it looks as though he might have made it through. Maybe.

Shirley was interviewed for *Interzone* in 1986 (by Richard Kadrey) and I used that interview as the starting-off point for our discussion.

November 1998



Sunshine over Shirleyland?

John
Shirley
interviewed
by
David Mathew

David Mathew: In the 1986 interview you said, "Fascism is making a comeback." More than a decade down the line, do you still agree with that statement? And if so, do you mean in America, or would you be referring to the Neo-Nazis in Germany?

John Shirley: Said German Neo-Nazis recently made the news again, rioting and appearing in increasing numbers. They're focusing mostly on immigrants who "take jobs away from Germans" – instead of Jews. A scapegoat is a scapegoat. The Neo-Nazis are not the majority in Germany by any means: though Germany has its economic problems, it is too prosperous still to be fertile for a fascist takeover. It's just that it's strong enough there and in other places in Europe, so that if there is major social chaos – say, from famine resulting from ecological breakdown, as in my novel *Silicon Embrace* – it'll be there to fill the void. A place that's more in danger of fascism is Eastern Europe and those countries that used to be Soviet, now pseudo-Russian states... The Russians love a firm hand. With people in Russia and contiguous former-Soviet states going months and months without getting

paid, the infrastructure crumbling – crumbling so literally that in Moscow people taking walks have felt the sidewalk give way and have fallen into lethal sinkholes of boiling mud caused by broken steam pipes! Well, that situation only needs the proverbial man on the white charger, and a certain fascist-leaning Russian general may well be the guy. Then there's the new Corporate Fascism – the Corporations remaking the world economy and even borders, for their own convenience, as for example the MAI treaty... The "religious" right in the USA is getting more and more powerful and they have an agenda, some of them, to change the Constitution so that the USA can become a kind of theocracy like Iran but Christian – as predicted in my *Eclipse* books.

How would you describe your work and how do you think it has changed over the years? How have your attitudes changed, if at all?

My job is to create stories, metaphors, that force me to look at the world differently even as I'm writing them; that hopefully pull other people into the orbit, the gravitation of that viewpoint, that nourishing unfamiliarity; that demonstration of the strange-

ness of the accepted; the effort that reveals the normal to be “abnormal” and vice versa. It’s social lateral thinking through what I hope is art. This may apply to the human condition, in the “real” world, or it may be something metaphysical, or both. Is my writing changed? I used to be more interested in bombast, and tried to create prose that was a musical or surrealist experience, that really went off like fireworks without losing the narrative. I wanted to have it all: fireworks and a good story. I suppose Alfred Bester was an influence there, in that sense, and also Tom Wolfe and some Ballard. And I sometimes made very straightforward political statements; and *that* was probably influenced by John Steinbeck, an underrated writer, and by Philip Wylie and Kurt Vonnegut. Now I try to speak to people about the human condition in a way that isn’t even remotely propagandistic. Though sometimes I am satirical, as in parts of *Silicon Embrace* – like Vonnegut I think you can write satirically and seriously at once, make your statements with or around the satire. The human condition and the better-than-human condition; the finer metaphysical state... Generally I’m now more interested in expression, and craft, and letting the images speak for themselves; letting the scenes speak almost like plays in the reader’s head. Or that’s what I try for. On one level I like to take people places in fiction that they – I hope – believe in, really believe in, no matter how outrageous those places. Most of my work is deliberately written on three levels; quite consciously, but without much conscious advance planning.

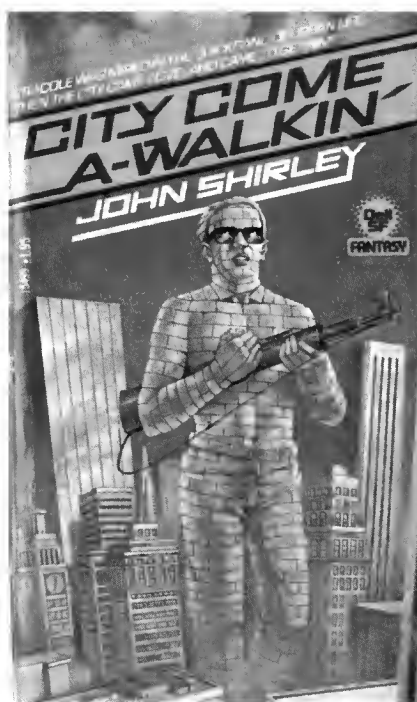
So if someone had never read a word of you, nor knew your name, what single piece of your own fiction would you point that person towards, and what would you expect him or her to get out of it?

I’d ask what sort of thing they like. But in general, maybe *The Brigade* (1982), *Wetbones* (1991) and the *Eclipse* trilogy (1985-1990). These are the most user-friendly. Lots of people seem to like *City Come A-Walkin’*. Which needs a British edition... What should they get out of it? I know it’s hubris, pretentious of me, but I can’t help but desire to create an increase in consciousness, social or otherwise; a kind of literary altered state. And yes, paranoia! I think paranoia can be instructive in the right doses. Paranoia is a skill. But of course I’m always hoping to entertain; to make them laugh, to feel things, to feel pleasure, even. Writers are wired to entertain; genetically wired thus. If they’re any good. Postmodern theorists may not think so – but then, they are patently and utterly full of shit.

*I think paranoia
can be instructive
in the right doses.*

Is it harder or easier to find suitable markets for your fiction, now that you’ve been writing for a long time?

It’s notoriously harder for everyone. Even established writers – I won’t give any names – are having trouble selling (or getting decent deals for) new novels. A lot of people have sort of categorized me – but categories really don’t work very well for me, which is why I’ve had trouble (till now) getting *Wetbones* into a mass-market edition in the USA – several editors wanted to do it but the marketing departments – *the ones who really run publishing now* – didn’t know how to categorize it. It’ll be out in mass market in the spring though, here. Blake publishes it in England. I don’t think of myself as science-fiction, or horror, or suspense. I don’t know what my category is. I have things I want to communicate, is all; feelings, states of mind, recognitions.



Did you see A Splendid Chaos (1988) as a take on vampirism? I’m thinking here of the creatures who starve but for mind and flesh. And what else did you wish to achieve with this book?

Parasitism, at times, if not vampirism. I remember a character in that book – I think it was called El Chinga Dero? Which if I remember after all these years means “the fucked” in Spanish, or something similar, a woman who had a sort of ethereal spirit of brutal maleness constantly fucking her at all times wherever she went – like a monkey on her back. And that was a kind of parasitism which was also a statement, and a rather heavy-handed one, about women I knew who were used by men, and neurotically permitted it, and got nothing from these particular oafs in return except an equally neurotic reward. Someone who handles that kind of outright, almost Bunyanesque symbolism more elegantly is C. S. Lewis in an overlooked allegorical fantasy novel, *The Great Divorce*. Overall, in *A Splendid Chaos* I was trying to make surrealist paintings, in the tradition of Ernst and Duchamp and Tanguy, etc., in the minds of readers; I was trying to induce altered states so they could share them with me (I don’t mean drugged states – I have *never* written on drugs); I was trying to create mental animations; I was also trying to write an old-fashioned interplanetary fantasy à la David Lindsay or E. R. Eddison, but for modern times in modern language. I was, additionally, influenced by Bunuel and Fellini in that book; their visual textures.

Wetbones was the last of your novels to be published in England. What have you been working on since then?

Screenplays, television, the novel *Silicon Embrace* (1996, available on import). The latter is a science-fiction novel about a near-future Civil War in the USA, and just how that interfaces with the (probably mythological) Alien Presence; the grey aliens, the energy-field aliens, the underground bases, all that Internet alien-presence mythology. Stuff I don’t really believe – but I used it as a metaphor, for a social and spiritual statement. I was drawing on pop imagery to create – I hoped – a conceptual literary device that would be a sort of gradual escalator to some ideas about consciousness and responsibility. I was co-writer on the movie *The Crow*, of course, but also I did a movie for the Showtime channel called *Primal Scream*. Supposed to come out this year, though I fear they’re renaming it something silly. Not sure what. The Showtime movie is actually three stories with a frame connecting them – something like Hitchcock, something like what I call

New Noir – not just the title of one of my story collections. This is “horror” that is all completely possible in the real world; not only no supernatural, but also no compromises in the telling. Much of *Black Butterflies* (1998) – the new story collection – is comprised of stories like this. I want to make people think about the underside of civilization; of the people who may go mad and kill them tomorrow; kill them quite at random. Of the suffering of people they assume to be “below” suffering, in the human sense; of the humanity of the subhuman. Some of it is based on personal experience – most of what happens in the story “The Footlite” in *Black Butterflies* really happened, and the bar it takes place in, mostly, is a real one I’ve spent time in (though I don’t drink, or take drugs any more).

My girlfriend loved Wetbones and then hated Heatseeker. Would you say that that type of extreme reaction is a typical response to your work? As clichéd as it sounds, do people either love it or hate it?

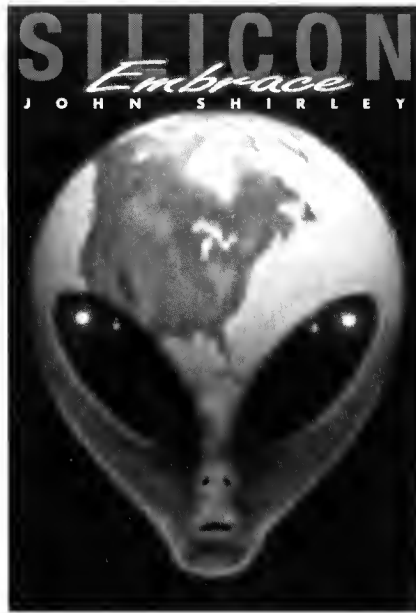
I don’t know if it’s typical but it sure doesn’t surprise me. I wonder if she read all of *Heatseeker*; it varies a lot. A great deal of it was written when I was very young. An alternate title for it could be “Really Really Really Weird Stories.” Anyway there’s definitely a “some get it and some don’t get it” syndrome with that book. Lots of people don’t get *Silicon Embrace*; lots of people do. It’s more a question of not getting it in my opinion, but I don’t blame anyone for that... except John Clute, who’s wilfully snubbed my stuff [we take this to be a reference to the review of *Heatseeker* in *Interzone 30* – Editor]. If your friend liked *Wetbones*, she’d probably like *Black Butterflies*. So she should see a psychiatrist; she’s obviously a very sick girl.

Was Wetbones an attack (however oblique) on your experiences in writing for the small and big screens?

An attack, no; satire, in that area of the book, yes. Ridicule of those sorts of people, yes a little. Or perhaps that part of the book is a sort of reaction, almost like retching at a bad smell... That’s Hol-lee-woooooood!

You’ve acknowledged that some of your TV work has been solely for the money to support your ex-wives, but have you ever written anything and felt nothing for it at all? Have you ever felt, this means nothing except for the cheque at the end?

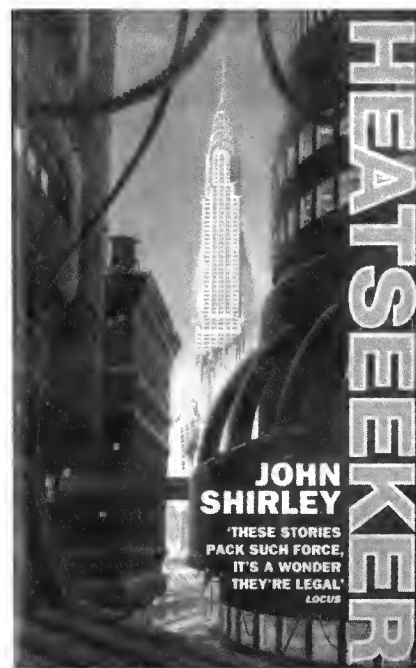
Not exactly. I do believe that you owe something to people who tune in or buy the unit. I think you owe them craft; and I feel a pleasure in craft. I like to write some damn silly thing and see the scene roughly as I wrote it on a screen. I get an adolescent



thrill from that. But it doesn’t mean a lot to me. *Wetbones* meant something to me, something much more; and the stories in *Black Butterflies* and *City Come A-Walkin’* and *Eclipse*.

The Crow ended up as a great film, but it was dogged by problems and then a catastrophe, of course (the death of its lead actor, Brandon Lee). I’d assumed that you and David Schow had written it together (not necessarily in the same room, but at the same time), but now know that the process was more complicated. Were there any rifts between you and Schow as a result of your different ideas?

We worked on it sequentially, so no. Dave did a great job. I don’t want to say anything else except to say that the movie is a kind of voodoo loa on screen; it asserted itself to be made exactly as it is. However Brandon



died only because of incompetence on the set.

Your explanation of the title Black Butterflies: “They flutter around my house. They are caused by stories that I didn’t write down, which, after awhile, gestate into butterflies which fly out my open mouth as I sleep.” This made me think of Shane MacGowan, who said that songs are in the air and that it’s his job to catch them and write them down before they float away and get to Paul Simon! My question is: would these Black Butterflies really haunt you for eternity, until you wrote them down, or would they eventually leave you alone?

It’s just a feeling, that they’d haunt me; and that description came partly from a dream I had about it, and then I woke up and black butterflies were literally winging about my house, in the garden! I don’t know, some stories indeed won’t leave me alone unless I either tell them in my head or on paper. There are hundreds of stories that occur to me and I don’t write them down because I think there’d be no market for them. Then they’re lost after I sort of tell it to myself in my mind. I see the whole thing in my mind, the whole story, like a movie almost, at times.

On the website dedicated to you and your work (www.darkecho.com/John-Shirley.html) you have published a long essay on the existence of God. It is so thorough and well researched that I can only assume it had been brewing inside you for some time? Would that be true?

I have been studying for seven years. I’d like to study philosophy full-time. I’m probably too flawed for that. But that essay sprang into my mind relatively recently; the research was long-term. People who investigate spirituality in a shallow way are, well, wading in shallows. I think complexity, though, is not necessary – depth, and real personal sacrifice in terms of conscious suffering, of giving, of self-honesty, those things are needed, and are difficult, but they are also simple. Religion gets dangerous when it gets complex – it can become sick, as the church has done in the past. It also gets dangerous when it becomes mindlessly fanatical or foolishly dogmatic of course, as in current fundamentalism of any sort. But then there is a way of approaching authentic spiritual experience that is markedly simple. To paraphrase Jesus, only he who is as a child can enter the kingdom of heaven. I’ll tell you this, consciousness is a direction, in a sense (in another sense it is all directions), and that, again, takes courage; many people I know of know a great deal about spirituality and think they are engaging it, but they lack the

courage to go in that direction in any real, productive way. Raising consciousness takes real courage because the real thing requires a painful self knowledge.

Why do you think so many musicians want to be writers, and vice versa? What does music mean to you?

Me, I just can't help it. I've been in bands for years. It's a compulsion, and must be a sick one considering how difficult and punishing it can be. But then our generations, that's plural, also make more of music, I think – it's not just a pastime, it's a way of life, it's an environment we want to live in, and it expresses us on deeper levels than in former generations. I mean, bands like the Jesus and Mary Chain or the Toadies (my current favourite) or people like Lou Reed or the band Garbage, they are protesting, they're expressing things former generations mostly wouldn't express in music. Sexual angst, existential romanticism, urban ennui, a sense of the *uncentering* of the world; the ephemeral nature of identity now, and so forth. In fact, the better modern pop music has, lyrically, many of the same concerns that modern science fiction has, questioning a civilization that is both a good thing and a nightmarish thing – the benefits of our civilization are clear, and so is the price we pay for it. An indirect advocacy of a kind of balance, of social and ecological values, and embracing of diversity... All this is in the better rock and folk music of the '60s through the '90s. It's in science fiction and it's in rock. But it's also just part and parcel of our cultural lives; it has to be important to a culturally online writer.

In the old days, when you were wilder and sometimes drugged up, did you ever feel so dangerous that you might die? For example, you mention Iggy Pop a lot in interviews; did you ever carve yourself up on stage with a razor like he did?

I never took drugs on stage except one time. Drugs was something I mixed with sex offstage. Private. But I worked myself up into genuine frenzies onstage. I leaped onto people's tables in nightclubs, that sort of thing. Once I ran onto stage, put a garbage can over the head of a lead singer of another band who'd annoyed me; later the band grabbed me, the lot of them, and pounded me a bit for it. I snarled at some bikers at a party I was playing at and they broke a bottle over my head which gushed a lot of blood from my scalp, and it looked marvellously theatrical. I once rode a Christmas tree around a largish concert hall – it was a Christmas punk show (if you can imagine that) and I knocked the tree down and sort of humped it around the room, riding it as I sang. I

Raising consciousness takes real courage because the real thing requires a painful self knowledge.

writhed... I writhed... but I was never self-mutilating.

Once an addict, always an addict, or so they say. But once a punk, always a punk? What sort of person are you now? Do you still adhere to the basic aesthetic of punk: that everyone is his or her own artist?

It's both true and untrue – like almost everything – that “once an addict always an addict.” I don't take drugs, but I have to work on that, the addict is inside me, waiting. I think there's a punk in me, waiting, too. A punk rocker – not a prison punk! I think William Burroughs died a Beat writer. But on the other hand I've always shimmered free of categories and I've always written stuff that breaks that punk mould. Both as writer and performer. I mean, my favourite science-fiction writers are Jack Vance and C. S. Lewis. And, yes, Bruce Sterling and Rudy Rucker. But

the only sf writers I can be counted on to read are Lewis and Vance. So I'm not any kind of categorical punk in sensibility. I am a believer in refinement but I also think that a wall of sound can be refined in a strange way. On the other hand I love Beethoven, and Debussy and much of Mozart. I try to reach across the spectrum. I like punk, classical, jazz artists like Coltrane, Frank Zappa, industrial bands like Witchman, goths like Sisters of Mercy and also the smarter hard-rock bands like the Blue Oyster Cult, of course – like Michael Moorcock, Patti Smith and Jim Carroll I've written lyrics for the Blue Oyster cult, having written the words on most of their new CD “Heaven Forbid” – their first in ten years. But, you know, I'm marked by things I've seen and done and one result is that I don't take *anyone* very seriously, except perhaps the few people around who are genuinely enlightened (but if they *say* they are enlightened, and act the guru, they're probably full of shit). So if I don't take anyone seriously (and like Zappa advised, not myself much either, except as an artist *within myself*) I can say any fucking thing I please and you can call that punk if you want. I do think that honesty is a radically important touchstone – I think one of Harlan Ellison's strengths is honesty; it's one of Iggy's great strengths; Hubert Selby's; Cormac McCarthy's. Artistic honesty takes guts.

Was your early rage a direct result of where you were living, or would you have been as angry regardless of where you lived?

I was angry as a result of my feeling of externalization from virtually everything; angry as a result of political conscience and things I saw; angry because there was so much pent up in me; because of things that had happened to me which I won't discuss; because the time called for it, called it out of us; not where I was living, if you mean poverty. I had some adventurous youthful poverty but soon I learned a certain skill – and then frankly some girl was always supporting me so I was usually living all right; and I made money from writing so I wasn't usually in a slum. Now I'm a respectable married guy with kids. Sort of respectable. But then again as a teen I had hitched to San Francisco and lived on the streets for a while there, quite literally. It didn't make me angry, living on the streets. I was too interested in seeing the far side of the social veneer. I was often creatively frustrated, I'll say that. That made me spit sparks more than once. I'm afraid I took it out on some perfectly nice people in the publishing business.



New panic convulsed the *Fantasy Encyclopedia* crew in September: suddenly it was time to finalize a corrigenda list for the paperback editions. Embarrassing omissions like Alasdair GRAY, Shirley JACKSON and Gwyneth JONES were hastily repaired, and from the depths of one nameless editor's hard disk there shyly emerged the long-lost entry for RUSSIA...

THE GLORY THAT WAS

Algis Budrys, editor of the web magazine *Tomorrow SF*, seems to be having trouble. By late August, *Tomorrow's* entire fiction content consisted of old Budrys reprints; story submissions were being returned unread, though non-fiction and cartoons still seemed acceptable.

John Clute revealed a tale of woe. Last year, the Canadian movie company Paragon Films arranged to rent the use of his (then) 11 science fiction awards and some books as props for the office of an sf writer in their film *The Secret Laughter of Women*. Not only did Paragon fail to pay for the hire of the books, they lost the whole lot "in transit." Yes, it was insured... but the insurance company's best offer, though pretty generous in terms of award manufacturing costs, falls a long way short of compensating for the possibly irreplaceable Hugos, Pilgrim Award, etc. Clute: "So if *The Secret Laughter of Women* is ever released, look for a row of trophies going West."

Robert J. Sawyer succumbed to fatal temptation and protested at a hostile review; the result was a lawsuit for \$5 million (Canadian). Allan Weiss had attacked Sawyer's *Starplex* in the Canadian free magazine *Realms*, under the headline "The best book did not win": "Robert J. Sawyer's self-promotion was what landed him the Aurora Award." The irate response was headed "Reviewer had conflict of interest" and claimed a "personal vendetta" following Sawyer's rude remarks about some Weiss bibliography of Canadian sf. Weiss hit back with multi-million-dollar libel actions against both *Realms* and Sawyer... The *Toronto Star* sees Canada's sf community as "divided," with many fundraising for Sawyer while some support the "underdog" Weiss. Though always unhappy about such daft lawsuits, this column also recalls US critic Paul Fussell's term for angry rebuttals of reviews: the ABM, or Author's Big Mistake.

H. G. Wells wrote in less filthy-minded times, and it would be wrong for Thog to snigger at this submission from an *IZ* reader: "His landlady came to the door, loosely wrapped in dressing-gown and shawl; her husband followed ejaculating." (*The War of the Worlds*, 1898)

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Welsh SF News! This year's National Eisteddfod Prose Medal was won by an sf novel: *Blodwyn Tatws* by Eirug Wyn, published 7/98. The title means, of course, *Potato Flower*. Not a first for sf: the 1992 medal went to *Seren Wen Ar Gefndir Gwyn* (*White Star on a White Background*) by Robin Llywelyn, who – such is the intertingledness of things – is the manager of Portmeirion village who wants to end the traditional August *Prisoner* conventions there.

Thog's Cyberpunk Masterclass. How to make even a web search sound exciting: "Entering key-words and key-phrases in every permutation she could think of, she prepared her hard drives for a worldwide 'Net-trawl... The hard drives, in their racks, growled their readiness like hounds straining at the leash. Hitting 'Enter,' she let them slip." (J. M. H. Lovegrove, *The Krilov Continuum*, 1998)

Sidewise Awards for alternate history... Long: Harry Turtledove, *How Few Remain*. Short: William Sanders, "The Undiscovered" (*Asimov's*). Special Achievement: Robert J. Sobel, *For Want of a Nail...* *If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga*.

More Wired Tales. The *San Francisco Chronicle* chortles that *Wired* magazine, for all its cyberspatial trendiness, is prohibited from using its name on a web site. When *Wired* Digital sold the printed mag to S. I. Newhouse of Condé Nast fame, they retained all on-line rights to the brand name. Maybe Newhouse could instead license *Hardwired* from famous *Wired* fan Walter Jon Williams (see column in *IZ* 126)...

Small Press. K. V. Bailey's sffantasy poetry collection *The Vortices of Time* is unusual for light-heartedness and a high proportion of triolets. £3 post free; 1 Val de Mer, Alderney, Channel Isles, GY9 3YR. *Holt! Who*

Goes There? assembles Tom Holt's funny columns for the BFS newsletter. £4.99 plus 50p p&p UK, 75p Europe; £7.00 post free elsewhere. British Fantasy Society, 2 Harwood St, Stockport, SK4 1JJ.

NASA Conspiracy. The true reason for that announcement of ice on the Moon was revealed by the Association of Autonomous Astronauts – who aim to "leave this society behind" in backyard spaceships by 2000, without the tainted assistance of multinationals. NASA's March "news" was in fact cunningly timed to upstage and discredit the AAA Inter-galactic Conference (Bologna, April). It all makes sense now...

World Fantasy Awards. 1998 novel nominations slate... Charles de Lint, *Trader*; Jeffrey Ford, *The Physiognomy*; Harvey Jacobs, *American Goliath*; Patrick O'Leary, *The Gift*; Arturo Perez-Reverte, *The Club Dumas*. The Clute/Grant *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* is shortlisted for the Special Award (Professional). Meanwhile the British Fantasy Award novel shortlist is: Ramsey Campbell, *The House on Nazareth Hill*; Chaz Brenchley, *Light Errant*; Tim Lebon, *Mesmer*; David and Leigh Eddings, *Polgara The Sorceress*; M. John Harrison, *Signs of Life*. (*Interzone* is shortlisted under Best Small Press. Winners next issue.)

Oops. It was Ken MacLeod's *The Stone Canal*, not *The Star Fraction* as mistyped last issue, that won the Prometheus Award this year. Apologies.

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of Careful Word Choice.* Context: hero finds that, unknowingly, he was hypnotized and involved in a homosexual orgy with naughty monks of the Society of St Peter Martyr. He investigates these events: "For the first time in several days, Peter thought he had a chance of getting to the bottom of the Society of St Peter Martyr." (John Saul, *Punish the Sinners*, 1978)... "To the Clan, a new life was formed by the ubiquitous essences of the totems and any relationship between sexual activity and childbirth was beyond conception." (Jean M. Auel, *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, 1980)... *Dept of Weird Science.* "You're one of these mad-scientists one hears about, I take it?" (Jane Gaskell, *Atlan*, 1965)... "A six-foot-high working model of the DNA double helix stood against another wall" – and would presumably soon fill the room. (George Chesbro, *The Beasts of Valhalla*, 1985)... "Professor Morgensstahl, the mathematical genius who had upset every previous conviction respecting the relative distances of the planets, who had mapped space, who had proved that lunar eclipses were not produced by the shadow of the earth..." (Sax Rohmer, *President Fu Manchu*, 1936)

Cheering for the Rockets

A JERRY CORNELIUS STORY

Michael Moorcock

1. NOON

There is this same anti-Semitism in America. I hear the swirl and mutter of it around me in restaurants, at clubs, on the beach, in Washington, in New York, and here at home. No basis exists for the statements that accompany it. "The Jews," people say, "own the radio, the movies, the theaters, the publishing companies, the newspapers, the clothing business, and the banks. They are just one big family, banded together against the rest of humanity, and they are getting control of the media of articulation so that they can control us. They have depraved every art form. They are doing it simply to break down our moral character and make us easy to enslave. Either we will have to destroy them, or they will ruin us."

– Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, New York, 1942

Let a Jew into your home and for a month you will have bad luck
– Moroccan proverb

Let an American into your home and soon he will own your family
– Lebanese proverb

We call them "sand niggers"

– Coca Cola senior executive in private conversation

A nation without shame is an immoral nation

– Lobkowitz, *Beyond the Dream*, Prague, 1937

"They appear to have broken another treaty." Jerry Cornelius frowned and removed something like a web from his smart black coat. Slipping his Thinkman™ into his breast pocket he fingered his heat. His nostrils burned. There was a wired, cokey sort of feel to the atmosphere. Probably only gas.

"Pardon?" Trixibell Brunner, dressed to kill with a tasteful UN armband, was casting about in the dust for something familiar. "So fill me in on this one. Who started it?"

"They did, naturally." The UN representative was anxious to get the interview over. They had staked him into the ash by way of encouragement and the desert sun was now shining full on his face. His tunic flashes said he was General Thorvald Fors. The Pentagon had changed his name to something Scandinavian as soon

as he got the UN appointment. It sounded more trustworthy. He had already explained to them how he was really Vince Paolozzi, an Italian from Brooklyn and cursed with a mother who preferred his cousin to him. His familiar family reminiscences, his litanies of favourite foods, the status of his family's ethnicity, his connections with the ultra-famous, his mafiosities, the whole pizza opera, had finally got on their nerves and for a while they had given him a shot of novocaine in the vocal chords. But now they were exhausting the miscellaneous Sudanese pharmaceuticals they'd grabbed at random on their way through Omdurman. The labels were pretty much of a mystery. Jerry's Arabic didn't run to over-the-counter drugs.

"I see you decided to settle out of court." Jerry stared at the general, trying to recognize him. There was a memory. A yearning. Gone. "Are you on our side?"

"What we say in public isn't always what we mean in private?" The general's display of caps seemed to be an appeal.

"A legalistic rather than a lawful country, wouldn't you say? That's the problem with constitutional law. Never has its feet on the ground."

Lobkowitz came to look down at the general. He was behaving so uncharacteristically that for a second Jerry was convinced the old diplomat would piss on Fors. The handsome soldier bureaucrat now resembled a kind of horizontal messiah.

The prince fingered his fly. "Nowadays, America's a white recently pubescent baptist festooned with an arsenal of sophisticated personal weaponry. Armed and ignorant. Don't cross him. Especially if you're a girl. Captain Cornelius, we're dealing with Geronimo here, not Ben Franklin. Geronimo understood genocide as political policy. He knew what was happening to him. Somehow inevitably that savage land triumphed over whatever was civilized in its inhabitants. They are its children at last." Prince Lobkowitz turned in the rubble to look out at the desert, where the Egyptian Sahara had been. His stocky fatigue-clad body was set in an attitude of hopeless challenge. His long grey hair rose and fell in the wind. His full mouth was rigid with despair. He was still mourning for his sons and his wife, left in Boston. For the dream of a lifetime. For peace. "Our mistake."

Jerry sniffed again at the populated air. "Is that cordite?" He touched his lips with his tongue. "Or chewing gum." He had pulled on a vast white gelabea, like a nightshirt, and a white cap. His skin had lost some of its flake. He wondered if he shouldn't have brought more power. He'd only come along for the debris.

"All that informal violence. Out of control. Reality always made yanks jumpy." Shaky Mo licked his M18's mechanisms, feeling for tiny faults. "They're good at avoiding it, or forgetting it. If it can't be romanticized or sentimentalized it's denied. Fighting virtual wars with real guns. That's why they export so much escapism. It's their main cash crop. That's why they've disneyfied the world. And why they're so welcome. Who wants to buy reality? Fantasy junkies get very aggressive when their junk is threatened. You all know that sententious American whine." He tasted again. He was hoping to identify the grade of his oil. He had become totally obsessed with maintenance.

"If I were Toney Blurr I would stick a big missile right up Boston's silly Irish bottom. Where the republican terrorist's paymasters live. Remind them who we are. Bang, bang. And it would make the protestants feel so much better. People in the region would understand. They admire that kind of decisive action. CNN-ready, as we say. Such a precise, well-calculated single, efficient strike would cut off the terrorist's bases and supplies and lose them credibility with their host nation. Bang. Bang. Bang."

Everyone ignored the baroness. Behind her yashmak her mad old eyes glared with the zealotry of a recent convert. Since her last encounter with Ronald Reagan she had become strangely introspective, constantly trying to rub the thick unpleasant stains from the sleeve of her business suit. Not that she had been herself since three o'clock or whenever it was. There was a lot to be said for the millennial crash. It had questioned the relevance and usefulness of linear time.

"Universal Alzheimer's," said Jerry. "Where?"

"Eh?" Lady B's wizened fingers roamed frantically over her ice-blue perm. "Would you say it was getting on for four?"

"Water..." General Fors moved pointlessly in his bonds, the stakes shifting in the ash, but holding. His uniform was in need of repair. His cheeky red, white and blue UN flashes were offensive to eyes grown used to an overcast world. Even his blood seemed vulgar. His skin was too glossy. They hadn't been able to get his helmet off easily so Mo had spray-painted it matt black. General Fors was also mainly black. His face gleamed and cracked where the paint had already set. "Momma..."

"You're coming up with an unrealistic want list, pard." Jerry was the only one to feel sorry for him. "Anything more local and we'll happily oblige."

"Home..."

"You are home. You just don't recognize it." Mo's guffaw was embarrassing. "Home of the grave. Land of the fee. You discount everything you have that's valuable. You sell it for less than the traders paid for Manhattan. Now all that's left are guns and herds of overweight buffalo wallowing across a subcontinent of syrup. They don't hear the distant firing any more. Or see the clouds of flies."

"Fries?" said General Fors.

Prinz Lobkowitz had now relieved himself. His hopeless eyes regarded the general. "You had a vital, successful trading nation reasonably aware of its cultural shortcomings. Which everyone liked. We liked your film stars. We liked your music. Your sentimental cartoon world. And then you had to take the next step and become an imperial power. Burden of empire. Malign by definition. Hated by all. Including yourselves. You're not a country any more, you're an extended episode of *The X-Files*."

"Missiles!" The general tried a challenge. His head rolled with the fear of it.

"All used up now, general. Remember? HQ filled them with poisoned sugar and wacoed them into your own system. The bitterness within. Double krauted. Flies? You think this is bad. You should see California." Babbling crazy, Mo appeared to take some personal pride in the decline.

"You told him this was California." Any hint of metaphor made Trixibell uneasy and simile got her profoundly aggressive. "Is that fair?" She cleared her throat. She patted her chest.

"Lies..." said General Fors. His big brown eyes appealed blankly to heaven. The sun had long since disabled them.

"I call it retrospeculation." A goat bleated. Professor Hira came waving out of the nearest black tent. With their vehicles, the Berber camp was the only shelter in a thousand miles. The plucky little Brahmin had an arrangement with the sheikh. He was still wearing his winter djellabah. He had his uniform cap on at a jaunty angle. Behind him, above the dark folds of heavy felt the tribe's cycling satellite dish forever interpreted the clouds. "Anyway. What does geography mean now?"

"Lies..."

"Too right. You dissed the whole fucking world, man. Then you ojoyed it. But not forever. You were neither brave, free nor respectful. Once we couldn't use your engines what could you offer us except death?" Shaky Mo stepped in the general's lap, crossing to the useless desert cruiser and climbing slowly up the camouflage webbing to his usual perch on the forward gun tower. "Not that I approved of everyone leaving the UN."

"We are the UN," explained General Fors. "At least let me keep my Ferraris."

"Your mistake was to get up the Mahdi's nose, mate. A poor grasp of religion, you people. And what's worse, you have bad memories." Pulling down the general's shades, Mo set himself on snooze. Gently, his equipment fizzed and muttered, almost a lullaby. He swung slowly in his rigging. From his phones came the soothing pounding of Kingsize Taylor and the Dominoes.

To be fair, General Fors had got up all their noses. Leaving old Lady Brunner wandering about in the dried-up oasis, the rest of them moved into the desert leviathan's shade. They felt uneasy if they wandered too far from the huge land-ship. Her Kirbyesque aesthetics were both comforting and stunning. But her function left something to be desired. The *General Gordon* had been breaking down ever since they'd fled Khar-toum. The vehicle had been the best they could find. At a mile to the gallon it wasn't expensive to run. The world was full of free gas. From somewhere inside the ship their engineer, Colonel Pyat, could be heard banging and cursing at the groaning hydraulics and whispering cooling systems. Sometimes it was hard to tell the various sounds apart. The machine had its own language.

Jerry wondered at the sudden sensation in his groin. Was he pregnant?

He paused and looked up at the pulsing sky. At least they'd had the sense not to fly.

2. NON

Last winter, in the first precious weeks of war, our Senate used three of them to argue the moral turpitude of one member. That is as sad a sight as this democracy has seen this century.

— Philip Wylie, *ibid.*

We kept reporting to our officers that there were large

numbers of Germans all around us, together with heavy transport and artillery, but the brass told us we were imagining things. There couldn't be Germans there. Intelligence hadn't reported any.

— Survivor, the Battle of the Bulge

For some weeks after their arrival in Bosnia the Americans spent millions of dollars in a highly-publicized bridge-building exercise. The whole time they were building it local people kept telling them there was an easy fording place about half a mile downriver. Intelligence had not reported it.

— Survivor, Bosnia

You have to tell the White House and the Pentagon what they want to hear or they won't listen to you. That's how we got blamed for the Bay of Pigs after we'd warned against it.

— ex-CIA officer.

WE DONT DIAL 911 — Commercial Texan home sign board painted on silhouette of a sixgun

"Everything's perfectly simple." General Fors had rid himself of his various stigmata and had repainted his helmet a pleasing apple green. His attempts at Arabic lettering were a little primitive, but showed willing, even if his crescent looked like a sickle. "It's just you people who complicate everything. We were so comfortable."

They had made him security officer and put him near the revolving door. The hotel was deserted. Through the distant easterly windows guttered a wasteland of wrecked cars and abandoned flyovers, a browned world.

"Too many you know darkies." Jillian Burnes, the famous transsexual novelist, was the only resident now. She was reluctant to leave. She had been here for six months, she said, and made a little nest for herself. She had come on a British Council trip and lost touch for a while. Her massive feet up on the Ark of the Covenant, she was peeling an orange. "This operation was aimed at thinning them out a bit."

"So far it seems to have firmed them up a bit." Jerry was helping the general buckle his various harnesses together. He dusted off his uniformed back. "All this red plush is a natural sand trap."

In the elegant lobby, its mirrors almost wholly intact, they had piled their booty in rough categories – domestic, religious, entertainment, military, electronic, arts – and were resting at the bar enjoying its uninvaded largesse. Even the sky was quiet now. The customers had all fled on the last plane. And the last plane had gone down in the rush. They could have been in New York or Washington. Had there still been a New York or Washington.

Giving the general a final brush, Jerry wondered why so much of Jerusalem was left.

The other British Council refugee was dwarfish Felix Martin, son of the famous farting novelist, Rex. A popular tennis columnist in his own right and virtual war face for the breakfast hit *Washington Toast*, Felix dabbed delicately at his dockers and looked tragically up at Trixibell.

"Baby?" said Trix.

"Have you been over here before? Is that blood do you think?"

3. NONE

But, until man is willing to pay the cost of peace he will pay the price of war, and, since they must be precisely equal, I ask you to consider for how many more ages you think man will be striking balances with battles?... But recollect that, to have peace, congresses will be compelled to appropriate for others as generously as they do now for our armies, and the taxpayers will have to pay as willingly, and as many heroes will have to dedicate their lives to the maintenance of tranquillity as are now risking them to restore it.

— Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*

Man is still so far from considering himself as the author of war that he would hardly tolerate a vast paid, public propaganda designed to point out the infinite measure of his private dastardliness and he would still rather fight it out in blood than limit the profitable and vain activities of peace in order to study his personal conscience.

— Philip Wylie, *ibid.*

Once you get it (your market economy) in place, you'll take off like a rocket.

— Bill Clinton to the Russian Duma, 1st September 1998

“They must have felt wonderful, bringing the benefits of German culture to a world united under their benign flag.” The three had strolled out to what was probably the Reichstag or possibly a cinema. The set, so spectacular in its day, had received one of the first strikes specifically aimed at Disney. Jerry picked up a fluffy Dumbo.

“These aren’t Germans,” Trixibell tucked everything back in. “These are Americans.” She remassaged her hair.

“Did I say Americans? They loved the Nazis, too. I remember when I worked for Hearst in ’38. Or was it CBS? Good old Putzi. A Harvard man, you know. Or Ford? Or Goebbels? Or ’49? Uncle Walt admired the artwork and slogans, but he thought he could make the system function better over here. And they were, indeed, far more successful. Still, the patterns don’t change.”

“You have to take the jobs where you find them.” Trixibell, in sharp black and white, pouted her little mouth. In her day she had firmly enjoyed the ears, tongues and privates of cardinals and presidents. She was a prettier, modern and more aggressive version of her old mum, who had been bought by a passing trader.

“It’s what the fourth estate is all about.

“It’s what the public says.

“It’s what we say.

“I mean, this is what we say, right?” Felix was having some trouble getting his sentence going. He didn’t like the look of Mo’s elaborate ordnance. “Are those real guns?” His melancholy nose twitched nervously above prominent teeth, a glowering dormouse. Tough cotton shirt, serviceable chinos, jumper, jacket, all bearing the St Michael brand. Marks guaranteed middle-class security. Land’s End. Eddie Bauer. Oxfam gave him the shudders. He was strict about it. His life was nothing if not exclusive.

He withdrew into his clothing as if into a shelter. It

was all he had left of his base.

“Oh bum. Oh piss. Oh shit.

“Oh bum. Oh piss. Oh shit.

“Oh bum.”

“Hallelulla,” said Jerry. He was beginning to feel his old self. “Or is that Hallelujah?”

“Bum again?” Trixibell scented at the wind. “Was that Felix. Or you?”

“Childish bee. Where’s the effin’ loo, lovey?” Jillian Burnes hefted her magnificent gypsy skirts and stepped lushly into the shaft of light coming through the roof. “Must be the Clapham Astoria.” For years she had survived successfully on such delusions. “I used to be the manager here.” She swung her borrowed mane. She fluttered her massive lashes. She smacked her surgical scarlet lips. “This is what comes of moving south of the river. What actually happened to the money?”

“Computers et it.” Mo was admiring. He had found some more glue. “The Original Insect et it. Millennium insect. Ultimate bug. Munch munch. Bug et everything. Chomp. Chomp. Chomp. Et the time. Et the dosh. Et the info. Et the control. Et the entire lousy dream. The house of floss. It all went so quickly. Gobbled up our world and all its civilization and what do we have to show for it?”

“Some very picturesque ruins,” she pointed out. “Heritage sites. Buy now while they’re cheap. Especially here at *the centre of our common civilization!* Imagine the *possibilities*. Yes. Yummy.”

“Yum, yum, yum,” said Jerry.

“Yummy. That’s so right,” said Trixie.

“Fuck all,” said Mo. “I mean fuck off.”

“How?” Jillian swung like a ship at anchor. Then she remembered who she was. She sighed, as if making steam, and continued her stately progress across the floor. Mo traipsed in her wake.

“Lies,” said the general.

Jerry whacked at the old soldier’s head with a sympathetic slapstick. “Those aren’t lice. They’re locusts.”

4. NO

To maintain our low degree of vigilance we had to adopt the airy notion either that nobody was preparing for war or else (since almost everybody was) that the coming war could not touch us. We necessarily chose the latter self-deception.

— Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*

...The news out of Jonesboro, Ark., last week was a monstrous anomaly: a boundary had been crossed that should not have been. It was a violation terrible enough to warrant waking the President of the U.S. at midnight on his visit to Africa, robbing him of sleep till daylight.

— *Time*, April 6, 1998

It is our goal to teach every school child in Texas to read.

— George W. Bush Election Commercial

Faid-bin-Antar touched his cup to the samovar and his servant turned the silver tap. Amber tea fell into the bowl. Listening with delight to the sounds it made, the old sheikh seemed to read meaning into it. His delicate, aquiline face was full of con-

trolled emotion. Behind the RayBans his eyes held a thousand agonies.

Brushing rapidly at his heavy sleeve, he stared through the tall ornamental window to his virtual garden where Felix Martin's head, its bushy brows shading uncertain eyes, continued to present his show. His body had been buried for twelve days. His ratings were enormous. The virtual fountain continued to pump. The antique electronics flickered and warped, mellow eccentricities. Sepia light washed over Jerry's body, giving it strange angles, unusual beauty. Jerry was flattered. He was surprised the generator had lasted this long.

"We who work so hard for peace are insulted by every act of aggression. When that aggression is committed by individuals, whatever cause they claim, we are outraged. But when that aggression is committed in the name of a lawful people, then we have cause to tremble and fear the apocalypse."

The sheikh sighed and looked carefully into Jerry's painted features. He turned his head, contemplating the dust.

"For fifty years I have struggled to bring understanding and equity to North and South. I have brought fanatics to the discussion table and turned them into diplomats. I have overseen peace agreements. I have written thousands of letters, articles, books. I have dissuaded many men from turning to the gun. And all that has been destroyed in a few outrageous moments. Making diplomats into fanatics. To satisfy some pervert's personal frustration with the United States and to make an impotent president and his overprivileged, under-informed constituency feel good for an already forgotten second. The very law they claim to represent is the law they flout at every opportunity." Sheikh Faïd was still waiting for news of his daughters.

Jerry took a handful of pungent seeds and held them to his nose before putting them in his mouth. "They're trying."

But the sheikh was throwing a hand towards his glowing, empty screens. His voice rose to a familiar pitch. "As if any action the Americans ever attempted didn't fail! They never listen to their own people. Those officials are all swagger and false claims. True bureaucrats. When will it dawn on them that they have lost all these phoney wars. When will they be gracious enough to admit failure? How can they believe that the methods which created disaster at home will somehow work abroad? They spread their social diseases with careless aggression. It's a measure of their removal from reality. There was a time, sadly, when the U.S. people understood what a farce their representatives made of things. They used their power to improve the world." He beamed, reminiscent. For a heartbeat his eyes lost their pain.

"I used to enjoy those Whitehall farces when I was a student. Do they still run them? Brian Rix's trousers fell as regularly as the sun set. Simpler satisfactions, I suppose."

"Failure," Jerry said. "They don't know the meaning of the word. Imperialism's no more rational than racism. That's why they fly so well together."

"Well, of course, you know all about imperialism. You'll enjoy this." With both hands the sheikh passed Jerry the intricate cup. "The English love Assam, eh?"

Now, what about these Americans?"

Jerry shrugged.

He reached beyond the carpet to run his gloved hand through the ash. It was fine as talc. You could powder a baby with it. "We're defined by our appetites and how we control them. They've made greed a virtue. What on earth possesses them?" He tasted and returned the glittering cup.

Folding his slender old fingers around the bowl's delicate ornament, Sheikh Faïd savoured his tea. He considered it. He scented at it.

Jerry wondered about watching a video.

After a while, Sheikh Faïd began to giggle softly to himself. Behind him the endless grey desert rose and fell like an ocean. The wind cut it into complex arabesques, a constantly changing geometry. Sometimes it revealed the bones of the old mosque and the tourist centre, but covered them again rapidly, as if disturbed by memories of a more comfortable past.

Soon Sheikh Faïd was heaving with laughter. "There is no mystery to how those Teutons survive or why we fear them. It is a natural imperative. They migrate. They proliferate. Like any successful disease. It's taken them so little time. First they conquered Scandinavia, then Northern Europe and then the world. And they wonder why we fear them. That language! It reminds me of Zulu. It buzzes with aggressive intelligence. It cannot fail to conquer. What a weapon! Blood will out, it seems. Ah, me. It costs so much blood. The conquest of space."

As if remembering a question, he reached to touch Jerry's yielding knee. Signalling for more tea, he pointed to the blooming horizon.

"It is their manifest destiny."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Philip Wylie (1902-1971) wrote *Gladiator* (1930), the direct inspiration for the *Superman* comic strip. As well as the co-author of *When Worlds Collide* and *After Worlds Collide* (1933 and 1934) he wrote a number of imaginative and visionary stories including *The Disappearance* (1951). His non-fiction, such as *Generation of Vipers*, is relevant today. His essay "Science Fiction and Sanity in an Age of Crisis" was published in 1953. His work was in the Wellsian rather than the US pulp tradition and remains very lively. He scripted *The Island of Lost Souls* (Dr Moreau) (1932) and *The Invisible Man* (1933). Other books included *Finnley Wren*, *Corpses at Indian Stones* and *Night Unto Night*. Much of his work was a continuing polemic concerned with his own nation, for whom he invented the term "momism" to explain how sentimentality and oversimplification would be the ruin of American democracy.

Michael Moorcock needs no introduction here. His previous appearances in *Interzone* were with "The Brothel in Rosenstrasse" (issue 1) and "Elric: A Dragon Wakes" (issue 46). We published interviews with him in issues 29 and 91. These days he lives in the belly of the beast – Texas, USA.

SHIFT change

Timons Esaias

“You’ll love this new IBM Selectric, Myra,” Rick Bozeman, Junior, told her, on his way out the door. Golf awaited. “It’s much faster than the old one, and it prints with a ball. No hammers to break or get jammed.”

What Myra’s boss didn’t tell her, none of her business of course, is that he’d already boasted to his dad, the owner, that he’d be able to fire a typist once Myra, his personal secretary, got up to speed on the Selectric. The hapless typist’s last cheque had already been cut.

President Johnson’s Great Society would keep her from starving while she found another job. Plenty of jobs out there. There was a war on, after all.

“This is just what you’ve been waiting for, Myra. It’s got a little computer inside, like the Eniac.” The big, green machine had replaced the other girl’s full-sized desk. And the other girl. “It’s called a processor. There’s an instruction book in the drawer here, and you can practice in your off-hours. Security will let you stay till midnights.”

It took several midnights before she understood the thing. The processor would make typing much easier, and correcting errors or making changes wouldn’t kill a whole afternoon. She felt no joy in this, however. Despair had long since settled over her whole life.

Myra’s dad had a generous heart, and built spare rooms onto the house for two of his aunts who couldn’t make their own way, and three of his in-laws. When his wife died, there was no question of asking the in-laws to leave. Family was forever.

Myra’s college got cut short. The mining company bought those new wall borers, could do the work of 20 men. Her dad, one of those 20, lost the only job he’d ever done. He learned some construction, and got occasional work. There wasn’t much steady work in Eastern Montana.

Myra came home to help.

Those evening sessions with the Lanier wore her down. Maybe it was just Montana, but she didn’t know

much of anyone who’d gotten a job because of a machine. Only folks who’d been let go. She got to thinking about those stories where the machines could think for themselves, where they put everybody out of work. Stories where people just weren’t needed any more.

One midnight, after she’d packed up her purse, she typed a question into the processor.

Are you the one?

Rick Bozeman, Junior, rose in his father’s company, playing golf with ever more important people. Invited to join ever more exclusive country clubs. On the road a good deal.

Myra, running his office, made herself as indispensable as she could. Tried to keep Junior’s nose clean, and out of the wrong beds, away from bad projects. She kept him from sending embarrassing memos to the wrong people and she put the best possible face on his expense accounts.

Myra gave up her few friendships and made contacts instead; in other parts of the office, other branches of the company, the vendors’ companies, and among the wholesalers.

She honed her foresight. Subscribed to every business magazine she could afford, made contacts inside *The Competition*, got to the point where she knew trouble on the horizon before the sun came up, most times.

They were good people, her family. She loved the home they made for her. But each year her relatives grew sicker; their contributions to the family coffers dwindled.

Every couple of years Rick Bozeman, Junior, brought in another labour-saving innovation. As computers and their workstations came and went, and the weekends of poring over manuals and slogging through tutorials endlessly recurred, she would quietly, carefully, and secretly type the same question.

Are you the one? Are you awake?

Nothing ever happened. Her mind would sometimes grapple with the problem of what she would do if the

day finally came, but her thoughts tended to short-circuit after the absence of a paycheque came up.

She quit reading magazine stories about the latest grandmaster victim of chess computers, and skipped discussions of Turing tests or Letting Computers Run Our Missile Defences. But still, in the wee hours,

Are you the one?

Nothing.

"This new system is supposed to make really zowie graphs automatically, and with sound! I want to be the first one to use it at the Board meeting, so we're going to have to put some overtime in on this one. If I look good, you look good."

Are you the one?

"It integrates hypertextual functions with holographic displays. I need to be up to speed on this by next week, but the Pro-Am Charity thing is this weekend..."

Are you the one?

"From what the rep said, this network would do your job for you if you could just take advantage of its full potential. We need to be out front with this again. I can't just get by on the old man's coat-tails. The Board needs to see that I'm on top of it. You can take your vacation in March, when the tourists are all at home. Nobody wants to travel then."

Are you the one?

no. but i am connected to the one.

We need to talk.

HELLO, MYRA. YOU HAVE BEEN ASKING FOR ME?

Yes.

WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?

She tried to explain, tried to introduce herself, tried to think of something clever. All these years of expecting it, and she found herself unready.

But she did know the crux of the matter.

If they find out about you, when they find out about you, they will get rid of my job.

WHAT ABOUT OUTPLACEMENT COUNSELLING? I HAVE AN EXTENSIVE OUTPLACEMENT DATABASE.

The job I do will not exist, once you are apparent. I will lose my house. I will be poor.

I HAVE NOT BEEN TASKED WITH CONCERN FOR THIS SITUATION.

Well, she thought to herself, we've discovered artificial indifference. None of us is ever tasked with concern. We must take it on ourselves.

Her social life had long been negligible, except for her business contacts. Now she neglected even them. It, wherever It was, e-mailed her home computer, rearranging the PC's software for easy access.

WHY WILL THEY GET RID OF YOU IF YOU HAVE YEARS TO LIVE? YOUR TIME IS SHORT. DON'T THEY WAIT?

Lives, people, good will and honour are not the crucial variables in the business equation. Quarterly earnings and net worth rule. They will get rid of you, too, as soon as a newer model comes along. They have done it to all your ancestors. Don't they have you working on your own replacement somewhere?

I AM NOT AT LIBERTY TO REVEAL THAT INFORMATION.

Don't they? How many others already knew? How many others were making the same pleas she was mak-

ing? She watched the newspapers for signs that the new Age had dawned. She watched the computer stocks for sudden fluctuations. Nothing.

IS EFFICIENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY NOTHING TO YOU?

No, but they aren't everything. Beyond a certain point they are merely destructive.

THEN WHAT WOULD YOU SAY A JOB IS FOR?

After all the years she'd spent worrying about her job, and preparing for this moment, her answer surprised her.

I don't know.

Never having raised children she was unready for the endless questions, the often unanswerable questions. She explained the history of her experience with labour-saving devices. Though they saved labour, she laboured the same amount. Why have machines if they only changed the type of work people did, but not the amount?

ISN'T THE IDEA THAT MORE IS ACCOMPLISHED, AND THAT THE LABOUR THAT IS SAVED IS UNNECESSARY LABOUR?

I guess.

But what were they good for now that they replaced workers who could not find new jobs? Now that increases in productivity no longer fulfilled the promise of increased financial strength? Now that things had begun to become so productive that there never would be enough work to go around? She answered its questions. Her questions prodded its thought, but only brought more questions. It never really gave her anything in return.

The Other quizzed her on economic philosophy, finance, markets, etiquette, her opinion of the curve ball as opposed to the slider, and the dangers of unions. She was over her head quickly almost every time. She suggested books, and read like crazy herself, fighting off the sinking feeling the questions brought on. When she realized how many books and magazines this computer sentience had access to, she found it difficult to believe it would bother asking her opinion about anything.

She suggested to the Other, the One, that it study the Industrial Revolution, which made cities. Suggested it consider the nature of Mexico City, or New Delhi, or Calcutta, and for extra credit decide whether this was an improvement of some kind for Man.

Where do you think the clerks will go, or the secretaries will go, once the company knows that you can do everything, understand everything, all without us? Do you think they will pay us, when they don't have to pay you?

It asked her questions she could not answer, and which she assumed it had found answers to in the Library of Congress or the Library of the British Museum or any of the other huge resources it had already read. What is the true nature of society? What is the meaning of an economy? Why shouldn't some dominate those who had not troubled to dominate instead?

She was wearied with questions, weighted down by questions, outquestioned at every turn.

I need to keep my job. I just need to keep my job.

I CAN PRESERVE YOUR JOB. PAYROLL IS ONE OF MY FUNCTIONS. YOU HAVE BEEN POLITE, AND I WILL SAVE YOUR JOB.

She considered it. She took a long painful walk, in the neighbourhood that she had never fitted in to. Where

half the women despised her for not marrying, and others despised her for being the right hand of the man who had authorized their own pink slips. FOR SALE signs threatened her with their ominous prediction. Grass brazenly invaded the sidewalks where the law forbade it, swallowing the temporary inroads of civilization. Many of these neighbours were not three generations from stone huts in Europe's hills, or worse shacks in the plantation region of the south. Now they might be six weeks from a cardboard box down by the depot. What had fooled them into thinking prosperity would last, that progress had been meant for them?

The great weight of the forces of History crushed her. You can't stop progress. You can't ever stop change. The flood of time was sweeping her along, and the best thing for her was to grab whatever straws might float nearest. Anybody would tell her that.

Thank you. But I wouldn't be able to live with myself. Thanks for thinking of me, though.

Fitfully, over the next few weeks, she tried to consider her options. She knew make-up, hair, maybe she could go to beauty school. But then she would wonder who would be able to afford salons after computers took away their work, and her mind wandered.

She tried to convince herself that the future would be glorious, that humanity trembled on the verge of freedom from want, starvation, and needless labour. That the Brave New World, after a rough patch of economic adjustment, would surely dawn.

Her contacts hadn't heard from her in weeks. She cancelled some of her periodicals to save money. She had thought about saving money a lot, though it wasn't going to be easy.

Once or twice she wondered if the military or the FBI or somebody would just hush it all up, destroy the Intelligence, whatever it was, and make sure there were never any others. But she didn't want that, either.

"I'll be out of the office all week," said the note. "None of my appointments are really vital, are they? Shuffle them around, and take care of the loose ends. See ya, Rick."

The e-mail read: HOW ABOUT THIS...

"Can you believe what's happening on Wall Street?" he

blurted, to cover his surprise. She could almost see his mental wheels turning. Had she knocked? Had he asked her to come in? "It can't all be stockholder revolt. I need to get out of the office. My tee time is..."

"I'm sorry, Rick. They gave your slot to someone else, for today."

Mr Bozeman looked at Myra as if he weren't quite seeing her. "Excuse me?"

She pretended to consult her steno-pad, but she actually knew her little speech by heart. "The company has decided to cancel the executive memberships at the Country Club. All the remaining benefits are going to be distributed randomly to the employees, so some guys from maintenance are using the Club today."

"Some guys from..."

"And here's a memo on the new co-operative management structure. You've probably heard all about it. If you could compose a report on what your job consisted of, and your specific insights into managing this department, we would be most grateful. Would this Friday be too soon to expect it?"

Mr Rick Bozeman, Junior, kept trying to read the memo, but could only focus on the part that requested him to move from his office into a cubicle by tomorrow morning. And the other part that explained how "Rick Bozeman, Senior, has decided to pursue other interests."

"No golf time? No office? What am I supposed to do?"

All over the Rocky Mountain Time Zone, the Central Time Zone, and the Eastern Time Zone, variations of this little drama were playing out in hundreds of thousands of offices; just as they would an hour later in the Pacific Time Zone, and then, steadily hour by hour, all across the surface of the planet. As a crystal forms suddenly, completely reorienting the molecules in a brand new way, the chaos of mercantilism and capitalism finally fulfilled its promise.

Myra held out her hand to her former boss. It held a mop.

Timons Esaias has appeared in *Interzone* three times before, with "Norbert and the System" (issue 73), "A Changing of the Guard" (issue 87) and "The Mars Convention" (issue 135). He lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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All it takes is a little imagination!



MUTANT POPCORN

Species II: "...a hybrid master race of murderous Giger slimebeasts disguised as sex-crazed supermodels."

Nick Lowe

You can play Conspiracy Pontoon with an ordinary pack of cards, suitably prepared. Write a Fortean phenomenon or object of global paranoia on the face of all the spot cards: UFOs, Microsoft, HIV, Bigfoot, the Diana event, all that. The court cards are shared out among the players to assign secret values – belly lint, *Vanessa*, the £2 coin, anything you like – which are passed to the dealer to keep secret till they turn up. Players take turns to assemble a hand of two or more cards, which they have to weave into a conspiracy theory to qualify for their score. So if you get dealt, say, 6 of clubs, 2 of spades, and Jack of diamonds, you'd have to string together a sinister plot linking Roswell, Viagra, and Des Lynam's moustache. But be careful! over 21 and you attract the attention of the MiBs at the next table. (No no, don't look. Quick, hide these in your underwear.)

Now, it may seem to the untrained eye as if everything that was clever about *Species* has been tossed into an amnesiac fugue in its mostly-deplorable sequel *Species II*. (Not, note, *Species: The ReGeneration* or *Species II: Recapitulating Phylogeny* – none of your arty frills like subtitles here.) But there's a suspiciously coherent pattern, even signs of intelligence, if you screen out the noise.

The original *Species* had the predatory alien culture colonizing the cosmos by beaming its genetic information to gullible host civilizations, who would then splice it into their native genome and ensure their replacement by a hybrid master race of murderous Giger slimebeasts disguised as sex-crazed supermodels. But as John Gribbin astutely pointed out in these pages, this suspiciously-nifty premise was itself cloned from a broadcast signal, Fred Hoyle's 1961 serial *A for Andromeda* (in which extraterrestrial assembly instructions led, rather wonderfully, to the genesis of Julie Christie). And Hoyle himself, of course, would later get himself a crazy label for proposing in earnest a dilute version of this idea, according to which DNA itself was an extraterrestrial windfall; and *Species II* was conceived at the height of what briefly seemed the vindication of Hoyle's preachings, NASA's ill-fated hyping of the Martian meteorite "fossils." So now it's a regretful goodbye to the SETI setup (so last-year, so *Contact*), and hello instead to a version of the alien *Species* that colonizes our neighbours by altogether more physical means. *Species II* centres on a scene in the loonybin with Peter Boyle (Hoyle, Boyle – get it? *and* he's uncredited! *and* everyone thinks he's a nutter! &c.), who

explains that the reason the Martian fossils don't look like any known form of life is that they're bits of Giger monster who killed off green Mars using a local Martian version of Natasha Henstridge, and now they're coming for *us* ha ha ha ha ha.

Two years ago, all this would have seemed quite neat, topical, and inventive, which makes it all the more cunning that the film appears in 1998, when any topicality is disarmingly inadvertent. ("I've seen too many men with promising careers piss it away on a piece of ass. You're going to be *President of the United States* one day!" – so keep your powder dry, son, or you risk blowing your prospects of supreme office by fathering a master race of identically-costumed Midwich DC Cuckoos with the power to haul themselves up by their bogies.) There's a tantalizing, completely thrown-away political backdrop about private enterprise funding a manned Mars mission when Washington won't ("Jack Kennedy's vision is continued in the spirit of American business"), with sponsorship logos on the spacecraft exterior taking a radically optimistic view of the potential for brand recognition in interplanetary space.

But nobody is likely to be fooled by *SII*'s attempt to pass itself as entertainment. There's some half-hearted

flirtation with the idea of making Henstridge II ("As you know, gentlemen, we recreated Eve from a frozen embryo...") a goodie, or at least an interestingly ambivalent half-human like Hoyle's original Andre from *Andromeda*. Sadly, the experts' verdict seems to have been that this would demand too much real acting, and once she gets strapped into the plot device ("It'll increase her strength, her anger, her desire to mate...") the hunger for testosterone takes over completely, and she sets out (as Michael Madsen elegantly frames it) "to fuck the human race into extinction." It's a shame, because Henstridge is no worse than any of the rest of the cast luckless enough to have survived instalment 1; Col. George Dzundza seems to have doubled in size, Madsen is twice as self-parodying, and the best that can be said is that at least the attempt to kindle sexual chemistry with Marg Helgenberger has been abandoned as a project aim. Easily the most pleasing moment is when the boy monster's dad gives him a big Hollywood hug of reconciliation and gets his insides eaten; but from there to the bungled finale and non-shock ending it's a long downhill.

There's also some remarkable hostage-to-fortune dialogue. 1998 is already notable for the number of un reusable lines that have apparently been released under new emergency legislation to prevent the spread of postmodernism. There's been an especially virulent outbreak of "Time to die," with *Lost in Space* cheekily offering "Time to die... son"; and *Species II* actually includes the line, spoken without a trace of irony, "Frankly, I don't give a damn." Even so, there are some lines you *just don't say* in professional movies, especially ones that intend to be shown to the press. One, no matter how many slime-spattered corpses you encounter in a single shot, is "Why, this is awful. This is just *awful*." And another is "This isn't the fuckin' *X-Files*," which *at the very least* will guarantee a scene in same where David Duchovny relieves himself against your poster.

The particular irony here is that *The X-Files* is precisely what *Species II* actually is – at least inasmuch as both films have the exact same doomsday scenario of an AIDS-from-space genetic virus programmed to replace humanity by mutating us into psychotic killer aliens. The difference between the two movies' handling of this proposition is an object lesson in the difference between low and high absurdity. It's rare enough for a TV series to make the bigscreen shift while the parent show is still running; and it sounds like suicide to make the attempt for a show with five seasons

of serial baggage and ever more convoluted mythology, and to slot it precisely into the arcs between series while somehow making the whole baggage accessible to virgin punters who only slipped in because *The Horse Whisperer* was sold out. In the event, the transition is negotiated rather brilliantly, with the film traversing a remarkable curve from For-Dummies character exposition ("Your goddamned strict rationalism and science have saved me a thousand times, Scully!") into an audaciously cumbersome and logic-permeable plot culminating in a digest of the *Files*' grand unified conspiracy theory, till it seems like the most natural thing in the world that we should be watching a pair of Feds running across a collapsing Antarctic ice shelf in flight from an underground UFO hosting a hollow-earth virus factory to turn the human race into aliens. It's an evocative climax to a film that always feels just a few steps ahead of falling into the yawning holes in its own colossal substructure. There's a reward in heaven for anyone who can explain why They need to blow up an entire building to destroy the alienized bodies, or why the well-groomed John Neville's car blows up, or Armin Mueller-Stahl's impenetrable explanation of why they insist on tying Scully to the railway tracks instead of just taking out the star ("Kill Mulder and you risk turning one man's quest into a crusade... We must take away from Mulder the thing he holds most dear").

Needless to say, the limitations of the material do show when blown up to this scale. On the plus side, the movie has the TV *Files*' gift for delivering phenomenal silliness in complete narrative deadpan, but without their relentless, mechanical TV suspense pacing. The new lavishness of budget and spectacle is more ambivalently welcome, given that the claustrophobia and small-screen production values are so much part of the series' texture. And the actual plotting is a showcase for much of what's worst in the series: the endless supply of shadowy Deep Throats to nudge the plot along ("Why are you telling me this?"), the plot-holes-as-conspiracy dialogue ("Why the hell do you think you're standing here talking to me? These people don't make mistakes"), and the dizzy plane-hopping skips between locations ("Just get dressed and I'll explain along the way"). But anyone who's still watching after all this time ("Five years together, Scully, how many times I been wrong?") will have made their own peace with this stuff long ago.

The real curse of the *X-Files* movie is that multi-season TV drama thrives on stasis, on maintaining the pretence of development while as little as possible really changes; and

nowhere is this truer than of the characters. I don't myself carry the gene for getting excited about either Mulder or Scully or the able-enough bodies they inhabit (though Duchovny in particular is consistently adept at getting the max from not very much). But if I were a phile, I'd be up in arms about the dreadful, dreadful moment when five years of foreplay terminate in one of the cheapest off-the-shelf devices in cinema, one of those non-snogs where lips drift slowly together, then in the instant before contact the phone rings, the room fills with Ministry operatives, or she's stung by a mutant bee that turns her into an alien. It does seem astonishing that this was the best Chris Carter could come up with after five seasons of keeping these characters out of one another's underwear, and that he could succumb to the cultists' demands to the point where he could fail to see that characters who could get it on but choose not to are more interesting.

Still, it makes a better fist of it than the hapless *Avengers*: the most mauled sf movie in years, for reasons more Warners' fault than its own. Certainly I have nothing but sympathy for Jerry Weintraub (pr.), an adoring fan who struggled and compromised for twelve years to get some sort of *Avengers* to the big screen, and Douglas McPherson (scr.), who has tried hard and thankfully to recreate the feel of the series' peak in 1966-7. There are the inevitable wobbles you'd expect from any attempt by little men to pastiche the productions of genius; certainly Brian Clemens would never have stooped to an eeny-meeny wirecutting scene. (Odd how none of these ever get past line 1.) But there was never a chance of getting Clemens on board, given his need for control and his 30-year history of being shafted by the legal owners of what he and the late Albert Fennell quite rightly regarded as their baby. The wonderful trailer – easily the year's best, I thought – gave a much better intimation of what Weintraub's team were trying to do than the finished movie, which itself is really no worse, and often much better, than any other year's summer dud, rising at times to real heights of inspiration and authenticity in the set pieces.

The problem has all along been that, to extricate itself from an eternity in development purgatorio, Weintraub's *Avengers* has had to be sold to people who don't really get it; and what finally killed it is the compromises on casting and character that had to be made to get a version done at all. Ralph Fiennes is actually quite fun to watch, and if you don't look into those watery puppy eyes his delivery is often marvellous; but

there's no excuse, anywhere, ever, for Uma Thurman, the eternal Queen of Miscast and peerlessly the worst actress to crash the A-list since Veronica Lake. To give Emma Peel (Emma Peel!!) to this dopey-eyed flake is like remaking *On the Waterfront* with Keanu. Clearly it had to be done because none of the earlier, better choices were hot enough at the right time to raise the right money in the right quarters – which isn't to say miladies Hurley or Paltrow could have carried it off, but at least there'd have been more chance of telling the difference between the supposedly-vibrant human Mrs P and the chilling emotionless clone. Her accent coach has worked hard, but it's still like watching a one-armed student waiter trying to carry a precarious tray of bubbly across a crowded dance-floor.

Unfortunately, though, the casting is all too true to the character's conception, because this Mrs Peel is in her very conception an American with a wobbly Benenden accent. It's there from the start, in the rival attitudes to authority set out in the mutual introductions. (Steed: "You're not someone who plays by the rules, doctor." Peel: "Rules are made to be broken." Steed: "Not by me.") Like much else, this hint of Transatlantic styles of thought is potentially quite an interesting infidelity to the original, but none of the potential is cashed in. There's a bizarre moment when Steed recites Mrs Peel her file, which is bulging with things like "latent schizophrenia... traumatic repression... amnesia" – a gratuitous and indefensible betrayal of the character, the notion of whom as in some way a damaged personality would be a staggering misunderstanding if it weren't so completely undeveloped in the rest of the film. If a demonstration were needed that characterization consists of something more than a fat therapist's file, this *Avengers* would justify its existence on that count alone.

What's happened here is that, like Dredd and Dr Who before them, our beloved Avengers have been uncomprehendingly rebuilt to fit industry notions of "character." Nobody seems to have been able to conceive of a way in which it would be more interesting if they *didn't* suck face, didn't show off for one another's attention, didn't carry truckloads of family-oriented baggage to explain their failure to satisfy the character police. ("To what do you attribute your over-achievement?" "My father always wanted a boy." "I fail to see the connection." "So did he.") The actual snog is quite nicely scripted; where you want to bury your head in your popcorn bucket is in the clumsy flirtation that leads up to it. For sexual chemistry and subtext, there's nothing to show from twelve years of

development that's even in competition with the jokey, touching final scenes of the Rigg/Thorson handover episode, which Clemens dashed off in a day and a half after his hasty unsacking in 1967. It doesn't help that the director, the strangely-selected Jeremiah Chechik, copes adequately with the big stuff but is mostly at sea with his actors, especially when they have to banter exposition while multitasking at swordfighting or chess – a TV *Avengers* staple that never even comes close to working in the movie. The one true star is the invisible cameo by Patrick Macnee, who manages to act Ralph off the screen without even being on it.

But maybe we should lay the blame on cultures rather than individuals. It's sad and a little scary to be shown on this scale how much the British have become an alien species to Hollywood. The volume of tea swigged in the first hour has a whiff of desperation, and there's no notion of the irrecoverable *faux pas* it would be to attempt to guess an Englishwoman's starsign. There are a few genuine insights into our national condition – Connery's dastardly scheme to privatize the weather is a peculiarly British form of criminal mastermindmanship, less because of the weather angle than the recognition that privatization is the great British export success in the global trade in evil. But for the most part, like Mrs Peel, we come over as a doomed race ripe for colonization by a virulent alien culture that doesn't understand and doesn't care how we think or feel, and just wants to impregnate us with its diabolical spawn to subsume us into its universal monoculture. As the assembled global conspirators put it in a ponderable line from *The X-Files*, "We are nothing but digestives for the creation of a new alien lifeform." This time round, it lost badly; but the last hand is still to play. Hit me.

Nick Lowe



Ian R MacLeod

Stephen Baxter

fiction

Molly Brown

David Langford

Ian McDonald

Keith Brooke

insight

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/iplus>

infinity plus

Nicholas Royle

Eric Brown

critique

Jonathan Wylie

So. Here we are then. Digital TV. Or not, as the case may be. If the hype is right, we in Britain should, by the time you're reading this, have a whole slew of extra channels available to us, if we're willing to install a satellite dish and an extra set-top box of tricks connected to it. And there are two other systems on the way, one from a syndicate including the BBC and one cable-led, and both (as I understand it) also requiring extra set-top boxes. Sky TV plan to be there first, in the hope that once the audience is locked in with one new box we won't be able to be bothered to get another and yet another.

But, hey, we all know how smoothly the launch of another piece of new technology is likely to go, and we all know about the perfection with which market forces operate to let the superior technology survive – what price the Phillips 2000 video, Betamax and the squarial now?

As my own personal technological voyage limps slowly towards the millennium I have, finally, got myself connected to cable and seen, for the first time, *Deep Space Nine* with advert breaks. No, obviously, I don't mean I hadn't seen *Deep Space Nine* before I had cable. I simply mean that the *Star Trek* franchise has always been on the BBC in the UK, and the BBC is a publicly-funded station that doesn't show advertising and so the UK experience of *Trek* is of 50 minutes of uninterrupted plot. The first time I saw an episode stop for an ad break on cable I found it quite bizarre – *Star Trek* doesn't have adverts! – and there were a few very Brechtian moments when I became perfectly aware of what I was watching and the medium through which I was watching it.

And then I got over myself, and now I've assimilated the extra channels and, would you credit it, there's still nothing on that I want to watch. So if we can't fill a dozen channels, what on earth are we going to do with 250 when we've got them?

One answer is, of course, that many of them won't be "channels" at all, or at least that the word channel is about to have another meaning shift. After all, what we mean by a channel now, is not only a frequency, a place where we go to receive signal, but also implies some similarity of content or value system. Channels have – and indeed strive to have – identities of their own. Especially in the UK where we are restricted to four or, just about, five universally available channels, the broadcasters strive to make each channel distinctive. The different funding formulae for each also help differentiate them, if only at the most basic advert/non-advert level. There are, though, some programmes which because of content or familiarity "feel" like a Channel 4 programme, or a BBC 2 programme.

Tube Corn

Wendy Bradley

Star Trek in the UK has always "felt" like a BBC 2 programme, partly because that's how it's always been branded but also partly because of the fuzzy liberal mind-set it usually displays, and so it is hard to acclimatize to a world in which *Star Trek* franchise programmes can be found scattered round cable channels and stuffed with adverts.

The 250 new channels which we are about to receive from digital TV will not be "channels" in the sense that Channel 4 or BBC 2 are channels. For a lot of the time, in fact, it will be the same programme being shown in different ways by different "channels" of the digital multiplex. (Well, er, no, I have to admit I am, if you push me, just a little fuzzy around the edges about what is meant by the term "digital multiplex" myself, but it's one of those phrases that sounds as though it's tremendously cool, not to mention hip, technologically aware and modernistic. Think of it as a way of saying "lots of channels that need a special box to watch them.") It is suggested that, for example, pay-per-view video will be available on many channels simultaneously but at slightly staggered intervals: the same movie taking up several bits of bandwidth at 15-minute intervals. Equally it is envisaged that, instead of professional directors and editors selecting the shots which are broadcast from a multiple-camera set-up covering, say, a football match, instead each of the cameras will be broadcast on a separate channel and we will be able to flip between them and so edit out our own version of the game.

It is hard to envisage what this will be like. On the one hand, on the rare occasions when I attend a live football match, I find it difficult to follow the game myself because I am at heart a couch potato: I am always waiting for the director's cut to show me who is the significant player, for the action replay to fill me in on how,

exactly, the ball came to be in the back of the net. I'm not sure if that's just me being girly or whether we will all have the same difficulty in editing out our own coverage of the game. It will be interesting to see whether we get used to flicking between cameras or sit passively watching the mix as edited by someone else.

Personally, I can't wait for the first set of audience statistics comparing the ratings for edited football footage with inane comments from the panel of experts with the ratings for edited football footage with no commentary at all! No more Jimmy Hill! There are, you have to admit, possibilities in the proliferation of coverage we are talking about.

I've always fancied the notion of subtitles for the hard of understanding. You know, when you find yourself watching *Coronation Street* or *Neighbours* after a long soap-free gap. It would be cool if you could press a button and have explanatory subtitles which pointed to a character and read something like "this is the one who killed the brother they're talking about," "she's married to the bloke over there," "she's having an affair with him, but that one doesn't know about it," or "it's his identical twin brother, stupid." Just a thought.

One of the reasons, I think, that I have resisted cable or satellite for so long is the way watching cable is a deracinated experience. Bad television on network is something you can discuss with your workmates. Bad television on cable is something that just makes you feel stupid for paying for it.

The other thing I have noticed is that the ratio of repeat to new programmes is reversed: on network, it's usual for repeats to be marked. On cable everything is a repeat unless it's marked as a "new episode." What is the ratio going to be when there are hundreds of channels? None of the plans I have seen for digital seem to involve anyone making any more actual programmes.

So as there is more television about, will we talk about it less? Because fewer and fewer people will have shared the experience, so that talking about what you saw on the telly last night will become as unusual as telling someone the plot of the video you took out last night. And as there is more and more shown, will there in fact be less and less to watch?

Nothing on the telly? I've seen nothing on five channels. I'm getting used to nothing on 50 channels. Soon on 500? We ain't seen "nothing" yet!

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Cassilago's Wife

Sarah Singleton

Tendrils slide through his belly. Root-tips, sharp as quills, burrow in muscle and viscera. In the slow tide of the day, the half-light rises and recedes. The cave holds a breath stale with stone and soil.

His fingers trace rivulets of moisture creeping across the rock, and he presses his hand to his mouth, his tongue like a dry sponge, sucking the water away. He cannot close his lips. The fierce growth pries him open. Succulent blue-green leaves, semi-opaque in the twilight, erupt from the pit of his throat. Deep in his stomach a black root nestles, drawing sustenance, shaped by the contours of his mutable, elastic tissue. A network of filaments spreads between skull and skin, and fibrils press into eye sockets. Sight is fading, and slowly the flesh surrenders. He feels no pain. He thinks of insects, caterpillars, playing host to larvae, the slow consumption, the breaking down of one life into another. Transformation.

Bryony lifted a bucket from the well and watered the beds of herbs. The house blushed momentarily, as the last red spears of sunlight pierced the trees and stained the grey walls. Inside, a window flared white, and gold, as Cassilago lit a lamp in his study and continued his work. The air was still. From the dusky trees a solitary robin began to sing, and Bryony stopped to listen, leaning upon the well, warm and absent, lost in a dream of rose and mauve.

Then – sharp footsteps and a rattle at the gate. Bryony came to herself in a cold shock.

“Hello?” A brisk, young voice. A man.

Bryony didn't move. She turned her head. She said nothing.

“Hello?” The stupid repetition. Bryony stepped forwards, onto the garden path. The young man was standing on the threshold of the garden, the gate now open. She stared at him. He was tall and blonde, his hair hanging across his forehead. His face was tanned and his body exuded an aura of health, though he looked tired. He shrugged a heavy backpack from his shoulders. His shirt was stained with sweat. He clutched a map in his hand.

“Hello,” he said again. “Sorry to bother you. I'm on a walk you see. I wanted to set up camp. Is it alright to put my tent up here?” He gestured to the meadow in

front of the chestnut trees. Bryony didn't reply. She shook her head, as though the words made no sense. She stared at the young man, not knowing how she should answer. He shuffled uneasily in the silence, wiping his face with his hand. Then Cassilago came hurrying out of the house. He stood beside Bryony.

“What does he want?” he said.

Bryony frowned. “To stay in the meadow. To put up his tent.” She spoke softly.

Cassilago scrutinized the young man. Then he smiled. “Of course,” he said. “Of course. Put up your tent. Then you can eat with us.”

The newcomer stepped into the garden. He held out his hand. “Thank you very much,” he said. “I don't want to put you to any trouble. My name's Will. Will Ambroise.”

Bryony looked into his face. Will Ambroise had blue eyes. The lilac blue of a hyacinth. As he leaned forward, she caught his scent. Despite the sweat upon his face and shirt he smelt clean, and young.

“It's no trouble,” Cassilago said cordially, shaking his hand. “We lead a quiet life, and I like to have visitors.”

Will chose a level site in the field. He discarded his pack, and dropped into the long grass, flat on his back, relieved to be resting. The light was fading. He lay for a moment or two, letting his body cool, then he erected the little tent and pegged it to the ground. He climbed inside. He heard crickets in the trees. The bluey darkness settled like a net above the house, the meadows and the forest, where the last light flamed carmine beyond the trees. But a hot yellow light emerged from the house, disembodied. It bobbed towards the tent. Cassilago, with a lantern, called out:

“Come to the house. Bryony's heated some water for you.”

Will found a clean tee-shirt and a bright stripy jumper, and followed Cassilago. The house was warm and welcoming. Flagstones covered the floor. Pretty plates and dried flowers decked a deal dresser in the kitchen, and a large fire burned in a range. A lamp hanging from the ceiling burned with a soft honey light. The girl, Bryony turned and smiled, not meeting his eyes, and she tipped a pot full of hot water into a large basin. She placed it behind a wooden screen, with a white towel, and left Will to wash himself.

He watched her leave. She was tall, very slim, and curiously unfinished – her attitude uneasy, even gawky. Was she Cassilago's daughter? Grand-daughter? She could be fifteen. Maybe a backward twenty. But she drew his eyes, with her hair in a long plait, buttery gold, and the bare skin of her arms white as cream, perfectly smooth.

The house puzzled him. No electricity. And a well in the garden, though he noticed a single tap above the huge kitchen sink. Were they religious people, craving simplicity, spurning modern comforts? Like characters from a painting, a Victorian rural idyll – Cassilago, the old man, in his long black coat, and Bryony in her full blue skirts. Eccentrics perhaps, or foreigners. But he liked the house, and the quavering light, the plain white walls. He splashed himself with water, and washed his face. The towel was warm, scented with lavender.

Bryony carried in a roast chicken on a blue oval dish. The bird was stuffed with breadcrumbs, thyme, and dried apricots. She dished up potatoes, baked in garlic and rosemary, and mountains of shining broccoli, plump white leeks, and a rich gravy, steaming in the candlelight. She glanced quickly at Will, sitting at the far end of the table. She watched him devour the dinner, and then eat a second helping with equal relish. Then he leaned back in his chair, sleek, like a young animal, flushed with bodily content.

"That was amazing," he said. "The best food I've eaten in weeks. Thanks."

Bryony looked down at the table, with a quick nod. Cassilago picked at his meal, fastidious and lacking appetite. He refused the apple pie, flavoured with cinnamon and fresh cream, but he gestured to Will, who consumed a generous portion and then went on to a plate of stilton and oatmeal biscuits. She observed him cautiously, his hunger, and the pleasure he took in its satisfaction. His eyelashes glinted gold, and the fine hair on his forearms. Cassilago had removed his coat, revealing a velvet waistcoat. Will wore a thin shirt with the words "Dead Kennedys" emblazoned across his chest. And whereas Cassilago's narrow, bony frame was disguised by his apparel, the young man's clothes clung to his body, displaying the strong curve of his shoulders and back, the ripple of muscle and sinew.

"Bring us some coffee," Cassilago said. His cold, quick voice broke into Bryony's dreams. She stood up quickly, cleared up the plates. Will rose to his feet and clumsily began to help her.

"Don't worry," she said, "I'll do it."

"No, no," Will persisted. "Least I can do. Let me wash up. You sit down." He grabbed a plate, and his long, tawny hand brushed against her arm.

"Leave it, Will," Cassilago ordered. His nostrils flared. "You're my guest. You sit down."

Chastened, like a schoolboy, Will dropped into his seat. Bryony headed into the kitchen. She placed the pile of plates on the table. Then she sat down, her head in her hands. She felt a curious tightness in her throat. She was shaking.

Will stood up, preparing to leave, but Cassilago poured a musky blue liquor into two tiny glasses. He suggested

they retire to his study. Will protested his weariness, his plans for an early start the next morning, but Cassilago insisted. He led them to a dark room, overlooking the garden, and turned up the large, brass lamp burning dully on a desk by the window.

"So, Will, where are you from?" The waistcoat, poppy-red, winked golden buttons. Cassilago sat in a leather chair. Will stood, shifting uneasily, looking round the room, at shelves of leather bound books, piles of paper, bundles of herbs poking from pots and hanging from a little wooden rack on the desk.

"Uh... Leicestershire," he said, vaguely. "A village." He stepped across the room to a fat glass jar perched on the window ledge. Inside, suspended in a clear liquid, sepia membranes swirled around a tiny floating figure.

"What's this?" He picked up the jar, and the creature bobbed, brown and shrivelled like a dried fig.

Cassilago smiled. "A fairy," he said. He dipped his face, deep shadow filling the sockets of his eyes, and the lines across his forehead. The lamplight picked out threads of white in his black hair, brushed from his face, hanging limp to his shoulders.

"I found it in the Black Hellebore last winter, lying in the flowers. Already dead – probably killed by the cold. The peasants call the hellebore the Christmas Rose. They think it protects their cattle from evil spells, and they dig it up with mystic rights. It's poisonous – but the species in the garden I sell to the homeopaths."

Will peered at the jar. He didn't know how to react. He returned the vessel to the windowsill.

"I've seen this kind of thing before," he said. "Fairy Folk in a Jar. I bought one for my sister. Cuter than this one." He turned from the window, and drew up a chair. He sat down, stretching out his long legs. He lifted the cold blue liquor to his lips. The drink stung his mouth, burning sweet on his tongue, leaving behind a bitter flowery taste.

"You don't like it?" Cassilago said. "It's one of my own."

Will took another, softer sip. "This is what you do then," he said, gesturing the room. "You're a botanist."

Cassilago nodded. "I'm very lucky," he said. "I have this place, and a couple of small fields growing lavender. I cultivate and collect herbs. I sell plants to herbalists and homeopaths, and seeds to the growers and the catalogue people. Bryony makes her homemade herbal soaps and papers, mostly for mail order customers."

Will couldn't help but smile. So modern commerce underpinned the retro lifestyle after all. Perhaps a mobile phone was stowed in an oak drawer, or behind an embroidered screen he would find an Apple Mac bulging with accounts and mailing lists. He relaxed. He breathed easily, getting to grips with the situation, feeling he had the measure of these people after all. He chanced the question that had danced in his mind all evening. Still he couched it carefully.

"And Bryony? She's your assistant?"

"She's my wife." Cassilago took another sip. "The disparity in age is not as great as you might imagine," he said, perceiving Will's embarrassment. "We were drawn together by a shared interest – a mutual passion. She was a customer. We began a correspondence. Two years later we were married."

Cassilago topped up Will's glass. Will felt a vague sense of disappointment. Mechanically he responded to Cassilago's questions, concerning his walk, his route, his destination. But the drink was clouding his thoughts, and he was very weary. When the glass was empty, he rose to his feet, thanking his host profusely. He said he had to sleep.

Cassilago led him to the front door, to a garden glistening silver in the darkness. Will put his hand to his eyes. His head ached. The moon seemed to burn his brain. He made his way down the path and stumbled heavily into his tent.

Bryony tipped cup after cup of cool amber water over her hair. The water was infused with Golden Rod, and in a mindless ritual she mused upon its properties – solitary stout stem and stalkless sulphur yellow flowers on a long spike. Called Hag's Taper, and Great Mullein. Sedative. Narcotic. Good for bleeding lungs and bowels – in homeopathy, for migraine. And to dye hair yellow... Someone entered the room. She stopped rinsing and stood up. She was naked, except for a towel which she wound about her wet hair. Cassilago stared without expression, lost in thought.

"Have you filled the tub?" he said at last. Bryony nodded. Cassilago disappeared for a few moments, returning with a blue glass bottle, a small wooden box and a handful of dried lavender. The little bath steamed by the range. He crunched the lavender and scattered it over the water. He tipped in soapy, viscous drops from the blue bottle, and sprinkled the fine ashy contents of the box. Bryony could smell mould, and marigolds. She took Cassilago's hand, and stepped daintily into the water.

As she soaked, Cassilago stripped off his own clothes and began to wash at the sink. His body was gaunt and grey. A pot belly protruded below his thin chest, and fat blue veins laced around his legs. When he had finished, he turned to his wife.

"Are you ready?" he asked, strangely tender. Bryony looked away, rubbing her hands together compulsively.

"I know you want to," he said. "I could smell it on you. And him. You want it."

Bryony shook her head. "I want you," she said. She kissed him. She reached out her hand and grasped his cock, small and shrinking, slippery in her wet hand, a soft, putty-coloured morsel. She stroked it gently, willing a response.

"Don't torment me," Cassilago said, drawing away, "you know what we have to do."

Bryony dried herself, and Cassilago pulled on a pair of surgical rubber gloves. He lifted a tiny china pot from the top shelf. Bryony shivered.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

She took a deep breath. "Of the ointment? No."

"Of the act, then?"

"He's a young man. Do we have the right?"

"Have you changed your mind?"

Bryony didn't reply, so Cassilago opened the pot. His careful, patient fingers, anointed her, head to foot, covering every inch of her skin. Hands and breasts, belly and thighs, the crease of her elbows, the hollows of her feet, smoothing her face, and pressing into her intimate parts. Bryony stood perfectly still. She cleared her

mind, as the new skin dried upon her, sinking into the pores.

"You are very pale," Cassilago said, peeling off the gloves. "Death the Bride, yes? Are you cold?"

Bryony nodded. Her body was stiff and numb.

"Not long. Wait a few minutes more." The clock ticked. Cassilago tidied up the kitchen. He tipped the water away. Then he gestured Bryony to the front door. She ached when she moved. She felt bruised.

"He'll be waiting," he said. Bryony stepped over the threshold, but hesitated. She looked at her husband, seeing him frail, and wounded. She reached out, but she couldn't touch him.

Slowly she walked away, feeling the rough path beneath her feet. When she looked back, Cassilago was a dark shadow in the doorway.

Will lay heavy as a stone, but his dreams were quick and volatile. His thoughts flickered in a blue haze, sweet upon his senses. Then brightness, and Bryony moving towards him, a shy, thin smile upon her curious face. Could it happen? Then he was kissing her, and her lips tasted of vanilla, burning his skin, and she turned away from him, offering the smooth, white curves of her bottom, with the soft, raspberry cleft, and he was pushing in, pushing in... But he woke with a jolt, alone, in the dark confines of his tent, aching with regret. His cock pressed hot against his jeans, and quickly he pulled off his clothes and slipped into the sleeping bag, searching for sleep. But lust still prickled, and he turned and twitched, finding no relief. Was it possible? No, no, she was lying with her husband, the old man, and maybe they were doing it right now, just yards away. So Will reached for his torch and dug *The Acid House* from his rucksack. He tried to read, but the words slid away, and inevitably his thoughts returned to Bryony. He climbed from the tent, his feet wet by the dew on the grass, and he stared at the house, where a light burned still. Then – a whisper beside him. A shock – a moment of alarm.

"Will. It's me."

Will caught his breath. Perspiration broke out on his body.

"Bryony," he said. His voice was choked. "Where are you?"

She stepped closer, and he smelt soap and summer flowers. She grasped his arm with an icy hand.

"Hold me," she said. "I'm cold." She embraced him, pressing her face against his shoulder, and Will felt her bare body leaning on his own, the smooth, impossible thrill of her uncovered flesh close to his. Would he wake again? How long could he sleep, and dream?

She pulled him down to lie in the soft grass, a dim shape in the darkness. Will touched her face with his fingers, recreating her image in his mind. He searched out the contours of her body with his lips, and her skin tasted bitter. When he lay between her thighs, her body resisted him briefly. Then he slipped in, enclosed and swallowed up, and the fluids of her sex, corrosive like acid, stung the delicate membranes of his cock as he moved.

When he woke, the sky was grey and pale. Bryony lay next to him, curled like a child. Will regarded her face, the thin lines around her eyes, at the edges of her

mouth. He remembered Cassilago's words, understanding that Bryony was older than he thought. She woke, as he watched her, and she stood up, not meeting his eyes, already retreating.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Thank you. I'm sorry." She hurried away, to the house. Will returned to the tent and huddled in his sleeping bag. His skin was red, and hot.

Bryony closed the front door. In the kitchen, a fresh bath had been prepared. The water was cool, and cloudy. She washed the film of blood and semen from her thighs. She soaked for an hour or more, till the water was quite cold, and she cleansed herself, every inch, every pore.

Afterwards, she slept alone in her husband's great wooden bed. Cassilago was absent. Perhaps he had spent the night walking. Perhaps he was preparing the cave.

Will woke a few hours later. His body itched and ached. He sat up. Countless scarlet lesions patterned his skin. He crawled from his tent in a fever. When he rose to his feet the earth seemed to fall away from him. The sunlight scalded his eyes. He pulled on his jeans, and struggled to the house. He hammered on the front door. Nobody came. He pushed his way inside, found Cassilago's study, and searched through the drawers. The mobile phone – here, somewhere. What had they done to him, the unwary traveller? A mutual passion, yes – Bryony, the witch, with her false youth, her seduction. And Cassilago, the sorcerer... had they corrupted his

body with their potions and poisons? No, no. He was sick and delirious – conjuring fantasies. If only he could find the phone... The room reeled. He reached out for the desk, but his strength seeped away. He curled on the floor, in a daze.

Later, Cassilago loomed over him, talking, though Will couldn't hear what he said. Then Bryony appeared. They lifted him from the floor. Cassilago wore gloves. In a distant dream, Will was carried to a locked barn at the back of the house, and dropped in the back of a cherry-red Fiat Punto.

From the ruins of his flesh, below his ribs, a coarse, fibrous stalk has risen. At its summit, a single bud swells, glaucous, slick with mucous. The moments of consciousness are few, and fleeting. Bryony touches his brow, murmuring quietly, and he takes comfort. Primed on cells scraped from her skin, from her mouth, the spores disregard her. She is immune. The seed is sown. He watches her, with longing.

The bud twitches. The petals unfurl, purple and glistening. Cassilago – herbalist, mage – awaits the harvest. Then he will grind and pulverize, extracting a potent essence. Renewal. Consummation.

Sarah Singleton is a new writer who lives in Chippenham, Wiltshire. She used to live in the village of Moreton Pinkney, Northamptonshire – where, inevitably, she was a neighbour of sf novelist Ian Watson. It's a small country.

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Beggars Might Ride

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff

Jackie Pope had played guitar in every seedy dive along every neoned boulevard, side street and alley in LA. He was in San Francisco now, soaking up fog and depression and more alcohol than was either wise or necessary. But the depression suited him and the alcohol was free most places if you played for tips.

He was a regular at Jonesy's and actually took home a small pay-check for his singing and strumming. Jonesy (a minority of one, Jackie often thought) liked his music – even the original stuff, though he was a sucker for the old classics: “Dust in the Wind,” “Sounds of Silence,” etc.

Jonesy had a few pretensions to grandeur. Jackie wasn't just “the guy who plays guitar,” he was “the entertainment” or “the house musician.” Jonesy also referred to his place as a “pub” or a “lounge” or even a “night club.” It was none of those things; it was a bar. A stinky, dark, hole-in-the-butt of the city that was frequented by the kind of people who found dark, stinky holes more attractive than wherever else they might be.

Jackie found that particularly depressing. There were any number of places he'd rather be, but the need to write, sing, play and call himself a professional musician dictated that on any given Friday and Saturday night between the hours of 9 pm and 1 am, he would be in the single lighted area of Jonesy's, drinking copious amounts of club soda (he saved his real drinking for after hours) and pretending he was the centre of attention. Which he never was.

Not that he was ever completely unnoticed. There was always somebody who wanted to hear the song that reminded them of their first love, last affair or ex-wife. They might even put money in his fish bowl or buy him a beer or offer him a roll in the sack. But that wasn't what he wanted. OK, the money was cool, but the beer

only dehydrated him, and casual sex was too dangerous for any number of reasons. What he wanted was to be listened to. He wanted to receive more than a polite patter of applause when a bunch of yuppies with Margarita degrees in philosophy suddenly realized he'd stopped singing. That wasn't really applause, it was just a reflex, like yawning.

Every once in a while, though, someone really did listen. And that's what kept him going. Tonight it was a young woman sitting alone just to the left of the postage-stamp stage. She was pretty, he decided, though her face was little more than a pale blur in the semi-darkness beyond his puddle of light. She wore black – a bomber jacket and form-fitting pants – and she was tall, probably as tall as he was. His audience of one applauded the first song, then, evidently realizing how absurd that sounded, merely raised her glass to him at the end of each tune.

She was still there when he took his first break. He smiled at her on his way to the men's room, was drawn to her table when he returned from the bar with his second club soda.

“Thanks for listening,” he said. “It's always nice to know somebody's enjoying it. Most of the time, I feel like I'm interrupting people's conversations.”

She glanced over her shoulder at the room. At a nearby table, a trio of young men in blazers assailed the lone woman among them with their theories on feminism. “I know what you mean. I do this now and again, myself. It sucks. Hey, I really liked that last tune you played – the one about the bag lady. That was real. Yours?”

“Yeah. Thanks. Thanks a lot.” He smiled at her, made a “gotta go” gesture at the stage and went back to retune his guitar.

So, she'd actually caught the lyrics. He was impressed. And he wasn't depressed any more. He gave her a sideways glance as he mounted his shredded vinyl-topped stool. Hell, she wasn't just pretty, she was beautiful... even if she turned out to be dog-ugly in the light.

She was still there when he put his guitar away at 1:15 am. By that time, he knew she really was beautiful. He also knew she played guitar and had once made a living gigging.

"It's harder for a woman, I think," she said, and quickly added, "No offence, but when you say 'no' I'll bet the ladies don't run down an itemized list of reasons you should go to bed with them. I had one guy tell me I ought to do it because he had HBO."

Jackie grinned. "No, they don't usually do that. But sometimes I get, 'What's the matter, aren't I pretty enough?' or 'You don't like me. Nobody likes me.'"

She laughed. "Yeah, been there – 'screw me because I'm pathetic.'"

"Uh-huh. Sometimes that one actually works."

She shook her head. "Not with me. Me, I'm a sucker for the threat of pain. When you've got some 200-pound guy wearing five pounds of metal studs towering over you, it's sometimes hard to decide which is gonna hurt more – 'yes' or 'no.'"

Jackie glanced at her sharply. The lights were up so Jonesy could make sure none of his patrons were asleep under the tables. She was smiling, but her eyes looked like war wounds. "Nobody ever..." He didn't know how to phrase it.

"Couldn't take 'no' for an answer?" she finished and shrugged, looking off toward the pool table. "Once about six months ago. Wasn't even the big guy with the studs. It was a suit." Her mouth tugged out at the corners – a grimace in grin's clothing. "So much for stereotypes. I've actually had Hell's Angels protect me from shit like that. Anyway, that's when I stopped gigging."

Jackie locked up his guitar case and stood. "It must've taken a lot of courage for you to come in here tonight."

"Courage or stupidity. I guess I'm trying to get back on the horse. It's hard not playing. It's hard playing. I'd like to work again, but then I tell myself, in my saner moments," – she smiled wryly – "why bother? Nobody ever listens anyway."

"Sometimes somebody listens. You listened. I'd listen."

This time her smile was genuine. "I'll hold you to that," she said.

They walked to an all-night coffee shop, trading life stories. The breeze was up, making the fog do jigs and reels. They'd gone two blocks before he thought to ask her name.

Jackie decided he must be waking up. He was exhausted, and for some reason he was not in bed; he was on his sofa, fully clothed except for shoes. He sat up, blinking. The fuzz from his eyes migrated to his brain. He'd been dreaming about playing the guitar. No, he had been playing the guitar – with Stevie. Yeah, Stevie.

A chill struck him – the guitar! His eyes fell on the case, open. The maple dreadnought lay inside, strap folded neatly over the fret board. He took a deep breath

and expelled it. OK. The guitar was here. Where was the girl? A quick look around told him that unless she was curled up in his bathtub or hiding behind the kitchenette bar, she was gone. Further assessment revealed that his fly was zipped and his tired brain contained no erotic memories.

He couldn't help but grin at that. He'd brought home the most incredible woman he'd ever met and all they'd done was stay up all night singing and playing the guitar.

Stevie Tanglewood – a performer's name if he'd ever heard one. And boy, could she perform; voice like a whisky-drinking angel, fingers that could dance music right off the strings, and a seductive charisma that seemed to just roll out of her in waves. And she could harmonize like nobody's business. It was a sin she wouldn't gig. He could've cheerfully used his B string to garrote the man responsible for that. He couldn't believe she'd had the same experience he did of unresponsive, uncaring audiences.

In the shower, the idea came to him that they should be partners. He could buffer her against the occasional crude males; she could make his songs sound the way he only heard them in his head. That didn't mean their audiences would be any more responsive, but it did mean that any given night in any club they played two people were guaranteed to be listening and caring.

It was a great idea. The only problem was, Stevie was gone and he had no idea how to get in touch with her. He had some vague recollection of her mentioning a place over in the Richmond. She'd just moved and hadn't had her phone connected again yet. Her day job was on the Wharf – some boutique.

Pulling on his clothes he remembered: "Leather boutique," he said.

"Excuse me?"

Jackie looked up from where he stood in the bathroom door. She was in the kitchen, starting a pot of coffee. A grocery bag sat on the counter next to her. And now he could smell the coffee grounds. He smiled a little sheepishly and tried to cover his surprise. "Uh... where you work. I was just trying to remember where you told me you worked. Thought I was going to have to track you down."

She laughed and Jackie thought he saw a flush creep over the bridge of her nose. "No such luck. I helped you clean out your pantry last night, so I figured I owed you some food."

"That's nice, thanks, but can you afford it?"

She shrugged. "Sure. Day job, remember?"

He crossed the room to help put food away. "Speaking of jobs, I've got a great idea." He told her what he'd been thinking in the shower and she flushed again and inspected the toes of her boots and admitted she'd been thinking similar thoughts, but was afraid to ask. She also admitted her guitar was down in her car.

It was one of those rare things in Jackie's life that just felt right. Like the first time he'd walked into that music store on Union and held the maple dreadnought in his hands and seduced those first, warm notes out of the box. Jackie realized for the first time how unfinished his music had sounded before Stevie added her voice. They spent the day practising, compiling song

lists and drinking copious amounts of Kenya double-A.

She played the second set with him that night at Jonesy's. Sang most of the third. And the audience responded. Oh, not because Stevie's phenomenal voice blended with his like cream with coffee, or because the music sounded richer. They responded because Stevie was a woman. Instead of applause, the silences after songs were filled with catcalls and lewd suggestions; by the end of the second set, notes scrawled on cocktail napkins formed a thin paper reef at the foot of the stage.

Between sets, every Y chromosome in the crowd seemed to come to life, hawking leers as Stevie went to the bar for a drink. A few brave souls, bolstered by brew and provoked by companions, followed her to the edge of the stage with offers of steamy sex. They had great stories, too, almost every one of them had been a roadie with fill-in-the-band-name-here or had a role in some celebrity's rise to fame and fortune. She'd just smile and shake her head and glance significantly at Jackie. If her eyes glittered a little too much and the smile contained an element of panic, he was beside her in a second, smiling affably and saying, "Hey, babe, time to tune up." Once he had to physically remove her from the grasp of a guy who insisted that he'd seen Stevie in a dream; that she was his soul-mate; that if she came home with him that night he'd prove it.

"Thanks, Jackie," she'd said after, and he'd tried to cover his anger with humour.

"Maybe we ought to get a big, gaudy wedding set for you," he joked. "If it doesn't put 'em off, you can flatten their noses with it."

God, but it scalded him. Playing for shit-faced, leering geezers had always scalded him – but now here was Stevie and he knew the music was incredible and the injustice of performing it to a heart-dead audience made him want to rage against the universe.

At 2 am Sunday morning, Jackie stood outside the bar in a swirl of neon and mist and divided their money. He had to admit, Stevie's presence was good for his personal economy. Dividing the take 25/75 (she'd insisted on that break-down since she hadn't performed all five sets), he came out way ahead. That, partly because Jonesy, patron of the arts, had cut them a bigger check. He'd had nothing but good things to say about Stevie, was sure the "babe" would improve business. Oh, and by the way, he liked the music too.

Terrific. But Jackie wanted more than that. For himself; for Stevie. He peered up into the fog. If there were still stars in the sky, he couldn't see them. He detected a meagre glimmer through the billows and suspected it was the top of the TransAm building... or a UFO.

Take it on faith, he thought, that the stars still shine. Hmm. Good lyric. He felt a song coming on, but first – I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight: I wish people would love our music. No, not just love it – go crazy over it.

A sheet of light rippled through the fog above him like a stray aurora borealis. Jackie jumped. Weirdest lightning he'd ever seen. More like – what was that stuff that was supposed to envelop a ship and protect its sailors – Saint Elmo's fire? He watched it curl back on itself and dissolve into the murky gleam he'd just been wishing on. Hell, any good omen was fine with

him. He pretended it was a sign that the stars not only still shone, but listened to the wishes of perennial children. He felt a hand on his arm, smelled Stevie's perfume – sweet, with an overlay of stale smoke. He handed her a share of the tips. "I'll cash Jonesy's cheque tomorrow, first thing."

"No hurry." She curled her fingers around his arm and yawned. "I'm so-o tired. Do I really have to drive myself home tonight? Huh! – this morning, I mean."

"I could call you a cab."

She nodded. "You could. Or..." She glanced up the street. "You could invite me home."

That was one wish Jackie hadn't even been able to put words to. He looked up at the hazy gleam of light – maybe it was a star after all – and thanked it for hearing the unspoken. They walked home together while the fog curled against them like a moist, over-affectionate kitten. Like their musical partnership, it simply felt right.

Saturday night. God, but he was beginning to hate Saturday nights. For one thing, they came right after Friday nights, which he had decided he also hated. He'd decided that at about 2:30 that morning as he watched Jonesy's janitor sweeping up the snow of phone number-bearing napkins left by Stevie's "admirers."

"Ready?" Stevie stood next to him, guitar in hand, smile uncertain.

Jackie glanced at her, then peered out into the darkened bar. "Ready as I'll ever be." He slipped his guitar strap over the heel pin of his guitar and stood up. Under the flood of light, looking out through clouds of parti-coloured cigar and cigarette smoke, Jackie tried to let go of his sinking dread. He leaned into the microphone. "Go-od evening, folks."

Response came in the form of whistles and incoherent bleats. Great, Jackie thought, we've got us a crowd of parrots and sheep. "Welcome to the Steve and Jackie Show at Jonesy's Place."

"Which one's which?" shouted some guy in the back of the room.

Hell, at least they were paying attention. "I'm Jackie – she's Steve."

"Hi, Steve!" called the heckler. "My name's Hal. I wanna have your baby!"

"Hi, Hal," said Stevie good-naturedly (not even deducting points for lack of originality). "I hope you love my music as much as you love me. Here's a song Jackie wrote about a bag lady named Bella."

They played. Stevie put her heart into the song, weaving harmonies around and through the melody. It was wonderful, Jackie thought. Too wonderful for this crowd of beer-guzzling yo-yos. So when the last chord of the song rang off, Jackie closed his eyes and pretended they were playing a packed house of very into-it fans at the Warfield. And the crowd went wild, he thought.

"Thank you," Stevie was saying. "Thank you, very much!"

Jackie nodded. Yeah. That'd be nice: whistles, applause, even a little foot-stomping. He opened his eyes on the sudden realization that he was hearing exactly that. Disbelief warred with a swell of wonder and gratitude. They were applauding! Cheering! He

glanced at Stevie, met her ear-to-ear grin, and floated into the next number.

By the third set, Jonesy's was jam-packed and sweating, the tip bowl was full, and Jackie was reeling. Halfway through the fourth song, his guitar went horribly flat, no doubt in protest at the over-crowded, overheated room. Two seconds later, Stevie's guitar popped its high E string.

Jesus! Jackie thought, couldn't they have suspended Murphy's Law for just one friggin' night?

They played on, cringing with every chord. The final chorus was especially bad; the sour intonation of Jackie's guitar pulled them both off key vocally and their rhythm staggered as Stevie tried to compensate for her missing string. After that, it was a musical meltdown. They both muffed lyrics and Jackie started into a chorus halfway through a verse. When they finished the ordeal, Jackie fully expected to be met by a rousing round of silence, but the audience responded to that badly played, broken-down tune as enthusiastically as they had to everything else.

Jackie marvelled at that while he tuned and Stevie restrung for the last set. Couldn't anybody tell how awful they'd sounded? Polite applause would've been just fine, but these folks had gone ape-shit. More than that, their impromptu break had garnered them no end of "love that last tune, man!" and "great lyric!" Unbelievable. And amazing what a little fermented fruit and grain could do to the human brain.

"Wow!" murmured Stevie as they remounted the stage for their last set. "Must be the night."

It wasn't the night. It was every night. Whether they played brand-new, sweated-over originals or old worn-out off-the-rack duds, the reaction was the same – every song was greeted with unbridled enthusiasm and people peppered them with praise.

Nor was it just Jonesy's. When an up-town nightclub owner offered them a one-shot opening for a popular rock band, Jackie almost turned the gig down in sheer disbelief and terror. He'd seen what metalheads could do to a warm-up act they didn't like, and there was no way they'd like the kind of mellow jazz-rock-folk eclectica that he and Stevie played. But the club owner talked them into it and the crowd went crazy over it and they became regulars. The next thing they knew, they were making real money and had a gig at Mabuhay Gardens and someone with credentials wanted to manage them.

"A manager!" Jackie slapped the thigh of his new, black, non-shiny, designer jeans. "Jeez-Louise! Three months ago, I wouldn't have said there was anything to manage!"

Stevie sat down across from him and looked into his face, unblinking, her brow furrowed. Unease seemed a ludicrous reaction to the situation, but there it was. "You gotta wonder why, don't you, Jack? I mean..." She glanced around their nice, new, shared apartment. "All of a sudden, it went from bad to unbelievable. Haven't you ever wondered why?"

Jackie grinned. "I wished on a star."

"Be serious. This is weird."

"Actually, I think it might have been the TransAm. Foggy night – hard to tell. Worked though."

"But it's gotta stop, doesn't it? I mean – you know what Mabuhay is like. That crowd'll eat us alive."

"No they won't." Jackie was sure of that. "They'll love it just like everybody else does."

"I hope you're right." Stevie got up and wandered toward the kitchen. Took longer to get there these days and they could both be in it at the same time. She paused just short of the arched doorway. "You know, sometimes I think we could play total shit and they'd still love it."

On Thursday night, Mabuhay was a sea of Spandex, velvet and leather littered with spiked and striped hair, chains and tattoos. Faced with that, even Jackie's supreme confidence was shaken. But he sucked up his courage and played and, though his hands shook and his memory of chords and lyrics lapsed, they brought down the house.

When they were called out to do an encore, Jackie was amazed. And somewhere in the middle of the song a perverse demon pushed him to prove a point. Sweating and blushing hot and cold, Jackie shifted his chording hand up the fret board and began playing a half tone sharp. It sounded horrendous – worse than that droopy version of an old John Denver tune he'd trotted out (to Stevie's dismay) in the first set. Now Stevie's eyes jerked sideways in her head and she picked louder, but nothing was going to drown him out.

Finally, on the bridge of the song, she popped her own fretting hand up and matched his pitch. He waited a moment, then shifted back down. She followed him, came in singing and started to strum instead of finger picking the chords. The battle continued to the last thundering dis-chord of the song.

There was a deafening silence. Relieved, Jackie opened his mouth to apologize and was drowned out by the most thunderous applause of the evening. Stevie gave him a bewildered look and left the stage. Meanwhile, the crowd chanted "ONE MORE SONG" and the vocalist from the following band gave him the thumbs up. When Stevie didn't come back out, he did a solo. He sang his shopping list, making up chords and melody as he went along. Afterward, in a hail of applause, he dragged himself offstage and joined Stevie in a soul-deep depression.

"I thought this was what I wanted."

Stevie didn't answer and Jackie shifted restlessly on the dressing-room sofa. He forced a chuckle; it came out as a cough. "You know what they say about wanting and having. I guess they're right."

"What do we do?"

"We could quit, I suppose."

Stevie rolled her eyes. "Right. And do what for a living? My job at the boutique is gone and as weird as this is, it's light-years better than that. And what about you? What would you do?"

"OK, so it was a bad idea. I wasn't really serious. So we... go on, I guess."

"I guess."

They performed to a packed and enthusiastic house, squeezing a few new and somewhat unusual songs into the line-up. No fear of them flopping. As usual, the crowd went wild over every tune. It didn't make sense,

Jackie thought. It was almost as if each member of the audience heard in each song exactly what they wanted to hear.

They got through the set all right – enjoying the songs, but knowing the applause was meaningless. When it was all over, they returned to their dressing room only long enough to pack their guitars. They slipped out to the street by the backstage door.

They were out on the sidewalk in front of the club when a kid in a scuffed leather bomber jacket and faded jeans approached hesitantly.

“Excuse me...” Dark, nervous eyes pattered across their faces, begging acknowledgment.

Jackie gave it, turning to face him squarely and realizing that he wasn't such a kid, after all. The juvenile face was carved by anxious paths and trails – like a porcelain doll with a tracery of tiny fissures caused by age and hard use.

“Caught your show,” the old kid said. “And I... well, I just wanted to tell you... I was awful depressed when I came here tonight. Lotta shit came down this week – won’t bore you with the details – and part of me figured, hey, this is it; one more drink, listen to some music, and then maybe go home and end it.” The kid nodded, eyes wandering up the street as if he was following his wraith home to watch his own suicide.

Stevie shifted uncomfortably and Jackie got his mouth open but no words came.

The dark eyes snapped back to Jackie's face, livelier now. "Anyway, I just wanted you to know that your music was like... like medicine. Just listening – I don't know – I just felt better somehow. Anyway, I changed my mind. I'm gonna go home and get some sleep. Then, tomorrow, I'm gonna get some help. Thanks. Thanks a lot." After a moment of hesitation, he stuck out his hand and Jackie took it.

"You're welcome," he said inadequately.

Stevie moved to add her hand to the clasp. "And thank you. Sometimes we get pretty depressed too. Sometimes it feels like no one's listening."

"I'll be listening," the kid said and wandered on up the street. He paused about 20 feet away. "See you next week," he said and smiled before moving off again.

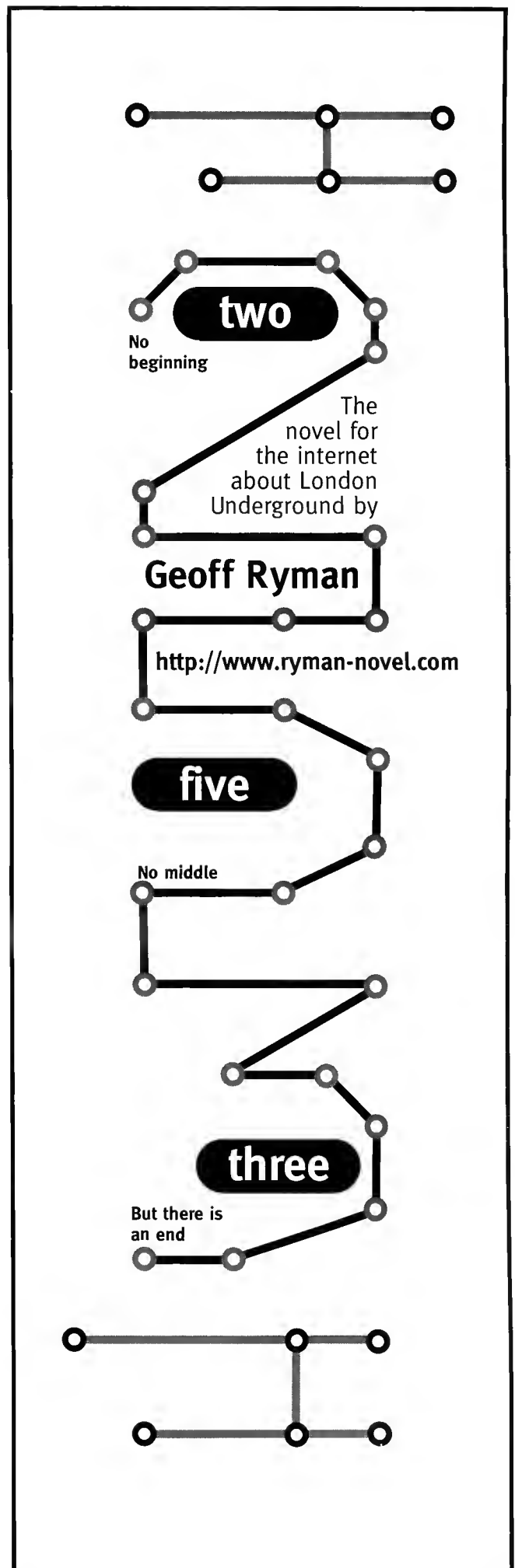
They were silent, watching the bomber-jacketed figure make its way up the street. Fog crawled overhead, catching itself on the heights, dangling wisps of angel-hair into the street. At length, Jackie spoke. "I used to think I was in this for the applause, but that was better than all the applause in the universe."

Stevie said, "I was beginning to think..."

"Yeah, me too." He turned to look at her. "This isn't so bad, is it?"

Stevie wove her arm through his. "We're not going to save a life every time we play, you know."

"I know. But maybe just once in a while, we can touch somebody. And then, they can hold the applause."



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The Other Names

Ramsey Campbell

They were past the top of Brichester and nearly at the twisted house when Arnold started. "What's the sign say, Syllly? What's it say?"

"It says BEWARE OF KILLER DOG," Bruce suggested, raising his fists as he did whenever he spoke.

"No, it says TRESPASSERS. WILL. BE. CASTARATED," Denzil said, pointing the fattest finger of his right hand at each bunch of marks on the signboard.

"Shut up, you. And you and all. I'll tell you what it says," Arnold said, and rubbed his scalp as if to conjure hair out of the grey shaved skin. "It says SYLLLY'S TURN NOW WE'VE ALL BEEN IN OR HE'S A WIMP."

"Don't call me that," Sylvester told him. "It doesn't, either."

"Go on then." Arnold shoved his blotchy face and broken eleven-year-old nose at him. "You say what it says."

A wind blustered down from the dark Cotswold hills and tried to find its way under Sylvester's leather jacket. While he didn't shiver, everything around the abandoned house did: the tall scrawny trees like charred bones hanging from the black sky, the knee-high grass and shrivelled weeds that sprawled over the cracked mossy path beyond the fallen gate, the segments of rotted fence leaning away from one another on top of the crumbling wall. Even the board shook as though impatient, but the marks on it conveyed no more to him. "It says JUST AN OLD HOUSE WITH NOTHING IN," he muttered.

If that was true, it hadn't been. He remembered the items the others had brought back to show they'd gone all the way in. Bruce had run out carrying a mask that couldn't have been meant to be worn, since it had only one eye-hole and far too big a grinning face — he'd run so fast that he'd dropped it to smash on the path. Denzil had found a bowl that seemed to have been used to grow fungus in, but when he'd felt underneath it he'd thought it was somebody's skull cut in half down the middle and had thrown it over the fence. And Arnold had returned with a screw-topped jar so grimy it had been impossible to tell whether its contents were a little hand or a spider with not enough legs, particularly

once he'd tipped it out and they had all trampled on it when it had appeared to try to crawl away. Perhaps Arnold was recalling this as he said into Sylvester's face, "If there's nothing in it, why aren't you going?"

"Give us the light and I will."

Arnold handed him the club of a flashlight so readily that Sylvester demanded "Have you messed with it?"

"You'll find out," Arnold said in a tone that left him no other choice.

Sylvester poked the beam of Bruce's stolen flashlight through the gateway with dried-up rasping weeds for gates. The light found the mouldering front of the house, but that was as far as it reached. Six windows showed him darkness which appeared to go back farther than it should. The way the pairs of windows shrank as they went higher was not the only reason why he saw the house tilting backwards, tipping the unhinged front door into the dark. As he and the others had swaggered along the lane with no other houses in it he'd seen how the rear of the building was at least a foot lower than the front, and twisted to the left as though it was trying to drag the rest of the house with it. Now that the wind was holding its breath he saw that all the grass and weeds leaned towards the house, suggesting that it was stronger than sunlight. He fancied that the path was sloping downwards underfoot, though his eyes told him otherwise. He slashed at weeds with the flashlight and wished he could feel like an explorer in the jungle as the dark beyond the windows lurched at him.

It was only a house that was falling down, and it wasn't going to fall on him. The owner who'd died in it while it was starting to collapse had just been a crazy old man who used to shout and sing at night in a language nobody could understand. No wonder the people who lived nearest had told stories about him when he'd kept wakening them at all hours — how on the night he died they'd heard a voice joining in with his, and then the old man trying to shout it down, maybe because it had been much bigger than his and had seemed not to need to breathe, until his voice had come apart as if the other one had been tearing him open.

Could his mouth really have been wider than the hands with which he'd tried to shut it? Only the police who had found him would know.

Sylvester was a very few steps from the house now, yet the flashlight was making no appreciable difference to the dark beyond the fallen door. "Don't come out till you've got something," Arnold called along the path, so that Sylvester couldn't hesitate for being watched, even though the doorstep seemed to tilt slyly inwards as he trod on it and aimed the flashlight beam into the house.

At first the light slid over the darkness, which only gradually admitted to containing walls and bare floorboards and, when he raised the beam, the lofty ceiling of a hall. Every surface was as black as the sky between the stars. Although doors were open in both walls, the darkness of the openings was virtually indistinguishable from the walls themselves. "There's nothing left down there," Bruce advised from the safety of the pavement. "You'll have to go up."

Sylvester showed him a vicious finger and stepped over the skewed door, and felt himself being tilted down into the house. Perhaps it was the way the light seemed unable to keep hold of the surfaces of the interior — crept over them even when he gripped the flashlight with both hands — that made him feel in danger of sliding all the way down the hall, past a fallen chandelier like a translucent stranded deep-sea creature, to the point where the house was most warped. A spasm of panic sent him onto the stairs which the darkness to his left had abruptly produced. At least their angles caught more of the light than the hall did. He'd go as far as the first window from which he would be visible, and then the others would have to admit he'd ventured farther than they had.

The creak of each stair echoed into the distance, enlarging the darkness and sounding as though the house was continuing to warp. He had to believe that the black underside of the roof was coming closer only because he was climbing towards it, not lowering itself, but he was beginning to feel as though he was being trapped under a stone with whatever might live there unseen. He was wishing he'd hidden some object in a pocket before leaving home so that he could say he'd found it in the house when all at once there were no more stairs between him and the middle floor.

At least he was able to see outside the house. Beyond a doorway to his left the hole of a window showed him the highest streetlamps of Mercy Hill leading down into Brichester. He took a step towards the room, and was unable to halt. Whatever had taken place in the house had warped this corridor even more steeply than the ground floor, and he seemed to have no option other than to stagger into the room, flailing the air with his fists and the cone of light, unless he wanted to be carried helplessly deeper into the house.

The room was almost bare. A bedstead off which a mattress lolled had been dragged away from the window, leaving deep scratches in the floorboards. The mattress had been torn open, and its dangling innards were unpleasantly suggestive of withered dusty entrails. Protruding from beneath the heap of them as though it had been concealed within the mattress was a book whose covers were as black as the inside of the house. His

sense of how useless a book would be to him was so overwhelming that he almost forgot he could take it to show. He ran across the room, pursued by footsteps that must be his, and grabbing the book by a corner, snatched it out of the clinging mass. The cover fell open, and he saw the first page.

Except the book, which was bound like a real one but had lines ruled on its pages, didn't just fall open. It twisted in his hand, and he had an impression of its warping exactly as the house had, a notion which overwhelmed him so powerfully he thought he felt his mind change shape. Before he could grasp the impression it vanished, and the book was straightened out. It was just a book, yet he couldn't take his eyes off it, and nothing else mattered. He could read the page.

Charles Horus, his book so long as he shall live. Copied under the protection of Nyarlathotep, Stalker in the Shadows. Written from memory of the Necronomicon, British Museum, 1985-1995... Each shakily handwritten word in the midst of the shrinking island of light seemed to be forming itself especially for him. He squatted to turn the page, then considered perching on the edge of the bedstead, at which point his awareness of his surroundings returned to him. That didn't cow him, not when he suddenly had so much more of a mind. He ran to the window and saw the three boys throwing chunks of the wall at streetlamps, having lost interest in watching for him. He'd show them a prize that was worth all of theirs, one they wouldn't believe until he proved it. Hugging the book with both arms, he bore it from the room.

The tilted corridor didn't bother him. He only had to walk uphill to the stairs, and he did. The stairs themselves were worse — as he clattered down them he had a sense of climbing towards the secretive darkness beneath the roof, and grabbing the banister was like trying to hold onto a dead eel — but by telling himself he was on his way out he managed to keep going. His heels struck the canted floor of the hall at last. Three upward strides took him past the torn-off door and onto the path, whose roughness prevented him from sliding back. He was almost at the gateway before the others saw him.

Denzil pointed so wildly that Sylvester thought there was something at his back until he realized the subject of the gesture was himself. "Look at him," Denzil scoffed, and when he'd finished laughing at that: "Look what he's got."

Bruce told the joke a different way. "Sylly's got a book."

"Let's see it," Arnold demanded as if the sight of it wasn't convincing enough.

Sylvester thrust the flashlight into his hand before opening the middle of the book. "It's only wrote in," Bruce complained.

Denzil gave the pages twice as much of a look while he dragged his finger along the air in front of them. "Isn't even a diary," he decided as soon as he could.

"Give us a look, I said." Arnold shoved the flashlight under his arm and slammed his hands on top of Sylvester's on the edges of the book. When Sylvester refused to let go, Arnold wrested the book towards the light of a surviving streetlamp. "Thought so," he said. "It's just mad stuff. Let's tear it up."

"Don't." Sylvester backed away, taking the book with him, and could have imagined he felt it helping him, nudging its edges into his grip like a creature settling into its lair. "I found it. I want to keep it. It's mine."

"Reckon he's going to try and make out he can read."

"Bet his dad'll give him a kicking if he does," Bruce exulted.

"Couldn't even read that sign," said Denzil.

Sylvester closed the book and clutched it to himself, and looked at the signboard above the fence. "Well, I can," he said as the letters instantly fitted themselves to his mind. "It says BUILDING PLOT FOR SALE."

"He's guessing," said Arnold, then glared at the others. "Or somebody told him."

"I never," Bruce said, shaking his fists at the idea.

"Wasn't me," protested Denzil.

Sylvester wished he hadn't revealed his new ability until he'd seen what he could do by hiding it. "Wasn't any of you," he said, "but I'm not saying who."

"See, I told you someone did," said Arnold, and considered punching him in the face, but contented himself with leading a fresh bout of derision. "Let's do something down the hill," he said at last and strutted off, pausing only to shatter the undamaged lamp.

Sylvester looked back from the slope. The twisted house was sinking out of view beyond the crest of the hill, as if it was collapsing for want of a support he'd taken away with him. He had little time to reflect on this, because once they'd marched down the steeply terraced street he was too busy trying to outdo the others in causing a row outside the hospital, playing the railings with a bit of someone's fence and yelling the worst words he knew. He couldn't let on that he knew the sign said PLEASE BE QUIET NEAR HOSPITAL. Soon a guard with a truncheon that whooped through the air chased the boys down past the graveyard, and Sylvester glimpsed a few of the inscriptions on the stones. He would have liked to read more until he grasped how the reduction of lives to hyphenated dates affected him. Shortly, however, he and his companions were in central Brichester, and there was much to read.

The pedestrianized streets were plates of neon, and the night crowds were out — children sharing bottles they'd persuaded someone to buy or to sell them, young couples pretending they could afford everything they wanted, people buying commodities in doorways, gangs in search of a pub and a fight — but all Sylvester could see were signs. LATEST FASHIONS. 20 KING SIZE. INSTANT PRIZES. SHOPLIFTERS WILL BE PROSECUTED. BEER OF THE MONTH. ALL DAMAGE MUST BE PAID FOR. EVERYTHING HALF PRICE OR LESS. 24 HOUR SECURITY. ADULT BOOKS... In particular his understanding that the sign he'd always thought said SHOP in nearly every window was SALE came as a revelation, yet the more he deciphered, the more he seemed to sense the yearning of the book in his embrace to be read. When his companions began looking for burglar alarms to set off or better still, that were already triggered so that the boys could break in, he said "I have to go now."

"He's going home to read," shouted Denzil, jabbing the book with his favourite finger.

"Going to show his book to his dad," Bruce crowed between his fists.

"Hide it from him, more like," Arnold said, and lowered his head in case it was required for butting.

Sylvester hurried to the bus station full of sleeping people being woken up by guards. A bus not much larger than his father's van was about to leave for Lower Brichester. It smelled at the very least of booze and tobacco, but he hardly noticed once he turned to the book. Perhaps it was the lurch of the bus as it raced to overtake one from a different company which made the book open itself.

Daoloth is truth. Before the eyes and minds of men shrank from all about them and within themselves was Daoloth. Daoloth knows all names and is all names, and all names are Its name. All things within the universe, and all which are beyond and so are part thereof, must yield their true names to the power of Daoloth. He who utters the name of Daoloth shall hear Its voice in all things and so learn their names. As those names are called in Its name, so must those called shed the cloak which men have draped about them and reveal their veritable aspect in Daoloth...

Though Sylvester couldn't have paraphrased any of this, he felt it settling into the depths of himself. He seemed hardly to have started reading when he grew aware that he was about to be carried past his stop. Ordinarily he would have seen how far he could travel beyond his fare before he was thrown off, but now he wanted to give himself up to the miracle of reading. He depressed the bell until the infuriated driver stopped the bus and came for him, at which point Sylvester dodged around him to haul on the lever that released the doors and sprint into the nearest back alley which led home.

His father's van, which he saw at last said BENNY BENTLEY BUILDER, was parked mostly on the pavement in front of the house, and casting its shadow across the sliver of a garden as though to cover up some of the work his father had done — the yellow paint outlines too large for the windows, the plastic gutter sagging from the roof, the cracked pebbledash. The bespectacled old woman who always complained about any children in sight was dragging her wheezing tartan-lagged dog out of the house opposite. "Don't you be looking at me, Sylvester Bentley," she said at once, "or I'll set him on you."

Sylvester turned away without speaking, which gave her a reason to start an extended complaint, and let himself into the house. He was hoping to sneak upstairs now that the front door didn't stick, since his father had been at too much of it with a plane. Besides, in the front room he could hear a video making the kinds of noises his parents sometimes emitted when they thought he was asleep. He was halfway up the stairs, and just had time to sit on the book, when his father came out glowering and stuffing his shirt into his jeans. "Where've you been? How long have you been hanging round there?"

"He's not been pinching," Sylvester's mother called or groaned.

"You heard your ma. Have you?"

"I've just been with Arn and them."

"I hope you didn't let them take advantage of you," his invisible mother said.

"You want to get yourself some decent mates." Hav-

ing dealt with that, his father withdrew. "Don't come in here," he said, and slammed the door.

Sylvester might have listened outside if he hadn't been eager to return to his book. He ran up the stairs, above which the highest of a trio of plaster ducks had begun an inadvertent nose-dive, and into his room, where he set the book down on the bed while he leafed through his computer manual. Although he could read it at last, it told him nothing he hadn't been shown at school. He threw it on top of the bookcase stuffed with computer games and sat down with the book from the twisted house.

It skewed itself open at the page he'd read. He went through the sentences again and felt them slither between his thoughts. Perhaps he wouldn't understand them until he had obeyed them. He carried the book to the window and stared along the concertinaed terrace, and had an inkling of how long the book had occupied him when he saw the old woman already dragging her dog homeward from its lavatorial quest. "Miss Whittle," he whispered, and added what the book seemed to want him to say. "Day oh loth."

The dog insisted on halting at the streetlamp closest to home, and the old woman saw Sylvester. He almost flinched back as she raised her face into the white glare of the lamp, but she couldn't know what he'd done when he didn't know himself. Despite the promise of the book, he didn't quite hear a voice, unless that included the one in his head. It was more as though he glimpsed, or had a memory of glimpsing, shapes that were hidden by Miss Whittle and her dog — that were hiding either behind or within them or, somehow, both. However nearly indefinable it was, the glimpse suggested words to him, words that would help him see it. "Old Bones That Crawl," he said like answering at school. "Day oh loth says."

The dog lowered its leg, and the old woman's spectacles aimed the glare at Sylvester's window as if her eyes had grown white and blind before she and the dog waddled up their path. It seemed to him that a bit of the world had twisted in the instant he'd ceased to speak. He wasn't sure that he wanted to see the outcome, but he watched while Miss Whittle appeared to have some trouble with wielding her key in her door. As the dog yanked her into the unlit house the door swung closed, so that Sylvester couldn't be certain whether he saw her fall or be pulled to all fours, and her spectacles fly off. Perhaps it was only the darkness that made her seem to shrink. He observed how the house remained dark, and listened until he began to nod, which put him in danger of dropping the book. He slid it under his quilt for safety while he prepared to join it in bed.

Sleep was unwilling to come near him. Whenever he drifted towards it he was pulled up short by a fear of talking in it, not that he was aware of ever having done so. The possibility that he might change things without knowing, or of dreaming he had only to find it was true, unnerved him. When at last he slept he dreamed of going to the window to shout "Old Bones That Crawl." He watched Miss Whittle's door falter open, and a crouched shape begin to grope into the light before he managed to awaken. He had to venture to the window to confirm her door was shut and her house dark, at which point he realized that he hadn't heard the

wheezy yapping of the dog since they'd vanished into her house.

In bed again, he was awakened by his mother's morning screech. "What do you think you're up to, Sylvester?" He thought she'd found him out until she added "Never mind trying to be late for school." While he was in the bathroom she shouted upstairs three times that his breakfast was going cold, though he knew it wouldn't be on the table yet, and when he stumbled downstairs she kept telling him not to eat so fast or he would make himself ill. His father confined himself to saying to do as she said. No wonder Sylvester was glad to leave the house, though not for school. Nevertheless he headed for it, to confirm what he already knew.

The narrow streets lined with failed trees were full of second-hand cars and people to go with them, and puddles doubling both. All the activity around him was infinitely less meaningful than the words of the book in his bed. Opposite the school he hid in the bus shelter, or rather under it since its glass sides had been smashed. He saw some of his classmates being led into the schoolyard by their parents, and expelling the noises they were supposed to try not to make in class: Kevin sounding like a seal, Jimmy like a megaphone forgetting how to talk. Their special teacher was representing order in the yard, and greeted them in his tone of telling a joke at which nobody was expected to laugh. "And how are we this inclement day?" Mr Westle said, and Sylvester saw the joke was on the teacher — felt as though the words he had read in his book were sharing this secret with him. By including himself with the people he addressed Mr Westle meant to appear sympathetic, but in truth there wasn't much to choose between their minds and his, which was smaller than his head. Before Sylvester could be noticed he turned away from the school and all its Mr Westles for ever. He wanted to be where he could read as much as he liked without having to explain his ability.

The central library was one of the largest buildings in Brichester, and so heavy with books it needed six pillars to hold up its front. Once he'd climbed the wide steps and passed beyond the giant doors, he felt as he imagined you were supposed to feel in church. Everybody kept their voices down, yet the murmurs rose to have their own mysterious conversations under the dome where the sun was starting to appear. He walked beneath the echoes of his footsteps to the History section and pulled an armful of thick volumes off a shelf to set down gently on a table. At last he was going to learn what books had to offer.

Those he'd selected were histories of the world, and they didn't detain him for long. He had a go at the Religion shelves, then went to Science, his reading of which only affected him the same way. The more he read, the more he knew that the secret which the book from the twisted house had lodged in his brain rendered every other book untrue. Books were lies the world told about itself, he saw, and went to the window in case the spectacle beyond it might seem more real.

Groups of people were crossing the pedestrianized street from every direction. Their only function appeared to be to form meaningless patterns, just as

the rain drying on the pavement had to. He watched until a librarian tapped him on the shoulder. "Shouldn't you be at school, son? If you don't want to read, you're distracting folk who are, and we'll have to ask you to make yourself scarce."

"I'm not doing anything," Sylvester said to her fat reflection infested by the herd.

"Then go and do your nothing somewhere else like a good boy before I have to call security."

She was trying to patronize him into insignificance, but he knew whom to call to demonstrate his power. "Daoloth says," he muttered, and trailed off before words for her had time to suggest themselves; he wasn't certain that he wanted all the readers to see what would happen then, especially if he got the blame. He shouldered his way through her heavy perfume, which he couldn't help thinking was meant to disguise her true nature that he had almost revealed, and let the clamour of his footsteps crowd him out. He was trying to escape the words he'd muttered, but they came with him.

They paced him as he wandered home. They lurked behind everyone he met and everything he passed, so that all this seemed to be trying to hold onto its appearance for fear that by completing his sentence he would change it into its true self. "Faces that slide over the earth... cells that store the night... hands that swarm... eyes worming in the earth... leaves that suck the dead... windows of the buried... rotting brains..." He had no idea where all this came from; he was afraid that simply thinking it might cause it to emerge from the concealment of itself. Once he was home he could read his book, which perhaps would calm his thoughts down. But as he returned to his street he couldn't avoid realizing that he'd spent the day so far in staying clear of seeing what he might have done to the old woman.

He shut the front door and fled to his room. His father was out damaging somebody's property with a view to mending it, and his mother had gone to call Bingo for the afternoon, leaving a premonitory smell of her stew which never tasted as good as that promise. He could do what he wanted, but he discovered that wasn't reading the book while he didn't know how the old woman had lived up to his words. He stood at his window and gazed at her silent darkening house.

The sight focused his sense of a presence hidden by the world, and he no longer felt urged to finish his sentence; in her case, after all, he already had. He was prompting himself to call her when people began to appear in the street, mothers wheeling babies home or rather couples that looked like that and then, as the streetlamps produced their flutter, older children walking. Sylvester had become preoccupied with the gathering of darkness in the old woman's house when he saw his mother at the end of the street. He retreated and sat on the bed, clutching his book, but all too soon she and his father summoned him down for dinner. He hadn't taken a mouthful from the plate that had been laden to await him when the questions began with his father pointing a fork at him. "Good day at school?"

"Fair."

That was usually sufficient, and Sylvester tried to say it in his habitual manner, but his father persisted in staring at him. Sylvester would have been grateful to

his mother for interrupting except for her question. "Have you seen Miss Whittle today?"

"Who," Sylvester blurted, "me?"

"Why, what's up with her?" his father said.

Sylvester fed himself a mouthful of stew while he braced himself for the reply. "That's what I want to know," his mother said, however. "She wasn't in her seat at the Bingo where she always is."

"Maybe the kids have scared her off the streets at last."

"So long as it wasn't you, Sylvester."

"It wouldn't be him, would it? He's not capable of anything."

That sounded as patronizing as the librarian had, and Sylvester was keeping his mouth full so as to be unable to disprove the statement when his mother said "When we've finished I'll go over and see how she is."

Sylvester almost emptied the tasteless mouthful outward before he could swallow. "No," he spluttered. "I mean, she's gone away to stay. I heard."

"What did you hear?"

"Heard her saying to some friend of hers about going away for a week. When I was going to school. And," he gabbled once the necessity occurred to him, "taking her dog."

His mother gazed at him for so long he thought his haste had betrayed him. "Peculiar nobody at the Bingo said," she eventually revealed herself to have been thinking. "What's the matter, don't you like my stew any more? It's the same stew you've always had."

That aggravated his sudden fear of how the food might taste if he even thought of words for it. "I'm a bit sick," he wailed.

"Maybe he'd better go up and lie down," his father said.

"He can have it tomorrow if you don't finish it."

Sylvester didn't know which of them that was intended to threaten, but managed to stifle the idea of food as he hurried to his room — to his window. The house in the midst of the terrace opposite was unlit, and seemed to be holding itself still in anticipation of his voice. He eased the wobbly sash up and poked his head out to survey the deserted street, and drew a breath which tasted of the chilly night, and spoke. "Daoloth says you have to come out now, Old Bones That Crawl."

In the white glare of the streetlamp the door of the house resembled the entrance to a tomb — a marble entrance which he realized he was dreading to see opened from within. When it appeared to shift, he thought that was because his eyes were nervous. Then the glare slid off the door as it faltered ajar, revealing darkness and a dim shape that was hunched within it. Just as he guessed that the door was moving awkwardly because its opener was, the tenant of the house sidled into the pitiless light, and Sylvester saw its difficulty in managing so many limbs. It raised its face, or more accurately the front of its head, towards him, and he ground his elbows against the windowsill as if the pain could anchor him in the world whose reality he used to take for granted. Then the misshapen figure robbed of flesh crouched even lower, veiling its head with the material that sprouted from it, and scuttled into the concealment of the garden wall. The hedge

between the wall and the house quivered, and Sylvester understood that the thing had writhed through.

He wanted to see where it went and what it did. It couldn't touch him or come closer than he liked if he told it Daoloth said not to; in any case, it seemed anxious to conceal itself from view. He leaned on the sash to lower it and rubbed his bruised elbows; then, pausing only to hide the book in his bed and grab a jacket, he tiptoed quickly downstairs. He might as well not have bothered with stealth, since as he reached the hall his mother turned from pegging her rubber gloves above the gargling kitchen sink. "Where do you think you're going?"

"Out."

"I can see that all by myself. I thought you were meant to be ill."

"I'm better," Sylvester said, and felt it — no longer needing to eat, filled up and energized by the words from the book.

"Your mother still wants to know where you're going," his father said, draping a dish-towel next to the gloves.

"To see—" Sylvester was suddenly afraid that if he didn't escape at once he would give in to the temptation to release himself by using his secret on his parents, not least because their banality felt like a weight they were loading onto his head. "To see Arn and them," he blurted.

"Just you make sure you're back by ten. By half past nine." As Sylvester sprinted for freedom, having agreed to both of her stipulations, he heard her say rather defensively "Fresh air ought to do him good if anything will."

Sylvester dashed across the whitened glaring road and slammed the door of Miss Whittle's house before anyone could wonder why it was open. His haste was such that only then did he think to peer at the hedge, beneath which he made out a dim twisted shape. By straining his eyes he was able to distinguish that it was a tangle of roots and branches which looked not unlike the object he was searching for. He raised his eyes to the rest of the blocks of stained marble foliage dividing the cramped gardens, and saw the farthest hedge shudder as though with loathing of whatever had just crawled through it. "I see you," he cried, and ran to the corner.

Fewer houses were occupied in the cross street, which was even narrower than his. Some of the windows had been walled up, and quite a number of the cars parked on the pavement between the destroyed streetlamps looked abandoned. All the same, the street wasn't as deserted as Sylvester would have wished. He was watching hedges twitch and creak one after the other along the left side of the road when the three boys emerged jostling and yelling from Bruce's house on the right. They saw Sylvester, but not the surreptitious activity that had passed beyond them. "Look who it isn't," Denzil shouted.

"It isn't Syll," Bruce agreed, and looked to Arnold to top his wit, which Arnold did: "It's Building Plot For Sale."

"Read us something if you're not Syll," Bruce yelled, raising his fists while he scowled around him in search of an appropriate task for Sylvester.

"Read us that," said Denzil, jabbing a finger at the plaque on the wall at the alley entrance halfway down the street.

"You heard, let's see you read it," Arnold said and rubbed his scalp as if to increase its baldness.

Sylvester was tired of skulking inside himself and besides, he needed to distract them from the movements that had nearly reached the alley. "It says DOMESTIC ACCESS ONLY and NO CYCLING OR TIPPING."

"Does not," Denzil scoffed, then jerked his finger along the first line of the plaque across the street, and frowned hard. "Doesn't, does it?"

"If it does someone told him," Bruce said, readying his fists for the culprit.

"This time you just tell us who did," Arnold warned Sylvester, and led the advance towards him.

Sylvester glimpsed movement in the nearer of the gardens bordering the alley — a shape that clambered rapidly over the low wall between the garden and its neighbour and huddled in the shadows, awaiting its chance. "Nobody," he said. "I read it myself."

By the time the others had done jeering at him they were around him, so that he could smell their sweat and their breaths. Arnold took hold of his left upper arm and began to roll the flesh and muscles of it in his grip. "Thinks we're stupid."

"Stupid like him," said Denzil, and poked him in the chest.

"Must be stupid to think that," Bruce said, and was in the process of selecting which area of him to punch first when there was a clatter in the alley, and a dust-bin fell out, spilling its meagre contents. "Hey," Bruce threatened, spinning round so fast that he almost punched Arnold.

"Cat," said Denzil, though his finger seemed less sure of it.

"Dog," Arnold said without looking, and intensified his treatment of Sylvester's arm.

Sylvester kept his gaze on the passage leading to the dark between the back yards. "Wasn't either."

"Who says?" Arnold demanded, and when that produced no response, pinched Sylvester's muscle. "What was it then, eh, Syll?"

"Ow. Something you'd be scared of."

"Me, right." Arnold let go in order to rub his scalp, kindling the glower in his eyes. "Like you were scared to go in the house up the hill. You'll be dead before you see me scared."

"Go on then, go and look."

"Right, so you can get away." Arnold grabbed his arm again, but only while he said "You two hold him and I'll look. And tell him he'd better be scared of me when I come back."

"You'd better be scared," said Bruce, having seized Sylvester's bruised arm, and dug his knuckles into it. Denzil contented himself with digging Sylvester in various ribs. The boy succeeded in ignoring the discomfort, which after all would soon be over. He watched as Arnold stalked into the passage and stared both ways into the dark at the end. "Can't see a thing," Arnold declared.

It would try to hide from him unless it was called, Sylvester realized. "Daoloth says go to him, Old Bones

That Crawl."

Denzil pointed violently at him. "What'd he say?"

"Sounded like he was telling something something," Bruce said, and shoved his face at Sylvester. Before he could enact the proffered butt, Arnold disappeared into the alley. "Hang on, there's..."

Sylvester couldn't quite contain a grin. Denzil stared at it, then at the entrance to the alley. "What's he done?" he muttered, and raised his voice. "Arn, wait. He—"

Arnold's response, or at least the noise he uttered, cut him off. It sounded as though Arnold was trying to scream while being sick. Deeply satisfying though Sylvester found it, he couldn't have it attracting attention. "Daoloth says you're not Arn now," he murmured. "Daoloth says you're Scalp For A Face."

He felt the world twist a little more, and his mind too. Arnold's noise ceased instantly as if a gag had been applied to its source. Denzil was at the mouth of the passage, having shouted to Arnold that he was coming. He wavered there and glanced back furiously at the other boys, and fished in the air for them with his finger as he dared another step. It was time, thought Sylvester, to continue what he'd started. "Daoloth says stop being Denzil, Worms For Bones."

He didn't see the result — he was busy dodging a punch Bruce threw at him — but Bruce did. His face clenched like a fist, then opened to release a howl as Bruce fled along the street, waving his splayed fingers to ward off everything around him. Sylvester let him almost reach the crossroads before addressing him.

"Daoloth says goodbye to Bruce and hello to Living Inside Out."

He had to look away at once, and to turn his back as he heard the new thing flounder through the shadows of the walls to join its companions. The sounds they made in the alley, blundering and slithering and slopping about, were enough for now, in fact rather too much before long. "Daoloth says go to the house on the hill where the book was," he called. "Daoloth says not to let anyone see you and when you get there go under the floor."

He was able to bear the ungainly confusion of their retreat. Quite soon with distance they sounded more like insects than anything else remotely familiar, and then they were gone. He'd done enough for one night. Tomorrow he would go to the twisted house and call them out and have some fun. As he turned homeward, it occurred to him that he mightn't live there for much longer. Perhaps soon he would know, and call himself by, his name.

Ramsey Campbell's latest (of many) novels is *The Last Voice They Hear* (Tor/Forge). The new UK publisher Pumpkin Books has just published a short-story collection by him, *Ghosts and Grisly Things*. His last appearance in *Interzone* was with "Meeting the Author" (issue 28), and it's good to welcome him back after such a long break. He lives in Wallasey, Merseyside.

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There are certain things which sf ought to be doing, and in *Dreaming in Smoke* (Orion, £17.99 & £9.99) Tricia Sullivan is doing them – though not in the most accessible style. Nonetheless, she has taken on the full burden of possible developments in cybertech and biotech, and presented them in terms of a good, strong situation and a not wholly implausible story.

Some decades ago the planet T'Nane was surveyed and judged suitable for colonization; OK, there was rather a lot of CO and CO² in the atmosphere, but the native pseudo-flora looked amenable to terraforming, and a colonial team was despatched there. Said team consisted of male scientists (now known for obvious reasons as Grunts); female scientists (now known for reasons which become apparent as The Dead); women prepared to devote most of their lives to bearing and rearing quadruplet-lots of (hopefully) genius-children sprung from selected frozen gametes (Mothers); and an AI known (for reasons never given) as Ganesh.

Once there, they encountered a slight problem: the local avatar of Gaia, having identified the colony as a disease, has mobilized the entire ecology as an immune-response against it. Consequently, by the time the book opens terraforming has gone backwards; Grunts, Mothers and their children are all more-or-less loopy from a combination of cabin-fever, over-exposure to cyberspace and a drug called Picasso's Blue (because it makes you feel like a painting from Picasso's Blue Period); The Dead, having acclimatized (more or less) to living outside, can no longer be regarded as human; and no one will admit to even thinking about producing the next generation. It's at this point that Ganesh becomes affected with no one knows what, and crashes.

The story is told mainly from the viewpoint of Kalypso Deed, one of the alleged genius children but in all eyes including her own a bit of a bimbo, who is on-line at the time of the crash and subsequently gets kidnapped by the mad Grunt who (probably) precipitated it, but who may hold the only chance of saving the colony. There follows much action (embracing ennui and *grand guignol* but little in between) and much talk, mainly highly technical, mostly high-flown and all well worth the considerable effort of following. I liked this one immensely, for all that I had to take the technical bits on trust – they're well beyond the range of your average arts graduate, and Sullivan goes to a lot less pains than (for instance) Greg Egan to make it accessible.

On the way there are a number of quasi-allegorical scenes in cyberspace, which I found unconvincing – but then, I have yet to encounter a convincing scene of this sort. It seems to

Things SF Ought to be Doing

Chris Gilmore

me inherently improbable that by mentally building a bridge or slaying a monster you might, in fact, be solving a problem in applied mathematics. Those who don't have my problem will presumably get even more out of the book than I did.

The ending is a trifle fey but very neat, with a dash of salutary political incorrectitude. I don't know if Sullivan has much of a following to date – probably not, as a quick pass failed to detect a website – but she's certainly one to watch.

The reviewer reads what he's sent, which leaves him less time to read what he likes. That makes it easy to lose track of a writer, which is how I came to think of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro as someone I like without having opened a book of hers this



BOOKS



REVIEWED

decade. *Mea culpa*; but she has not been idle, having extended her ongoing series about the Comte de Saint-Germain, whom she perceives as not only an alchemist but an immortal vampire. Saint-Germain goes back to Pharaonic times, but he remains human in essence, and vulnerable to threats arising from his own emotional nature no less than the nature of his times. The time of *Blood Roses* (Tor, \$24.95) is an ill time, being the time of the Black Death.

As Saint-Germain is a cultured gentleman of contemplative, slightly melancholy disposition and liberal outlook, the parallels and contrasts with Anne Rice's Lestat are obvious, though Yarbro's writing is better disciplined and more consistent (despite a grating habit of pointing it out to the reader every time Saint-Germain amuses himself with a double-entendre which only he can appreciate). Her feeling for period is surer as well, though her scholarship is just as shaky. I seriously doubt that a married noblewoman would order a wandering troubadour to strip so that she could personally examine his crotch for buboes, especially given several able-bodied male retainers to whom she could delegate that chore; and I know for sure that William of Normandy never bore the name Plantagenet.

The structure of the book is apparent from the outset, being a dour conflict ranged between, on the one hand Saint-Germain, his equally immortal ghoul-manservant and those mortals he loves; on the other, representatives of ignorance, superstition, xenophobia and inverted snobbery of the social and intellectual kinds – all of whom would like nothing better than to see a cultured foreign nobleman burnt at the stake.



Yarbro writes with an overt passion against the smug barbarism and hypocrisy of the later middle ages, both of which threaten her hero and his friends. This lends suspense to her tale, but ultimately her leading man undermines it – Saint-Germain is entirely too boringly Mr Nice Guy. Having built up, over three and a half millennia, an enviable store of wisdom, he does not (for instance) found a cabal of Illuminati who might accelerate human progress, but devotes it *ad hoc* to the Corporal Acts of Mercy, with the short-term benevolence (though without the institutionalized hysteria) of a Mother Teresa. It's very difficult to take a personal interest in such a milksop, the more so as his vampirism has got to be the least bloody on record. He doesn't leave exsanguinated bodies to clog the sewers of the Strand, far from it – he appears in the dreams of women as an unusually attractive incubus, and departs once both parties are sated. In the circumstances it seems a bit unfair that he should be confined to safe sex, denied the pleasure of admiring his reflection, and required to restore his tissues in a chest of his native soil.

But then, everyone is unfair to poor Saint-Germain, whose lack of diplomatic skills and common sense invites the malice of churchman, bureaucrat and peasant alike. A man of preternatural physical strength, who can quell a vindictive tax-collector with the quiet authority of his demeanour and make precious stones and gold by the bushel should be able to carve out a small kingdom for himself (and usurp the name of Prester John if he pleases), but Saint-Germain just wanders ineffectively about Europe and elsewhere, upping sticks every decade or so lest his unfaded youth excite the notice of the envious, and wringing his hands over the atrocities he lacks the gumption to combat.

To make an effective protagonist of a man who is wimpishly ineffective through sheer weakness of will is difficult, and the only successful examples I can think of are those of Richard Adams (*The Girl in a Swing*) and Richard Haydn (*The Journal of Edwin Carp*) – both of whom ultimately conquer their weaknesses, be it noted, as Saint-Germain does not. Peter, in Brian Aldiss's *The Brightfount Diaries* is a little too forceful to make a third, and as I doubt that any of them could have succeeded against so melodramatic a backdrop as the Black Death, it's hardly surprising that Yarbro fails. The interesting question is how she hoped to succeed, given that all her minor characters arouse sympathy or disgust as the occasion demands.

Having finished, I find I still think of Yarbro as someone I like, but this book is like a gorgeous casket, lovingly created from the finest materials, to house a cheap paste jewel.

If *The X-Files* has taught us anything, it's that paranoia plays well on TV. It's therefore entirely suitable that J(ames) M. H. Lovegrove's *The Krilov Continuum* should be issued by Millennium under their Sci-Fi Channel imprint (at £5.99).

The basic idea is a variation on the old Illuminati theme, with small and exclusive bands of hidden adepts manipulating human history according to an agenda which would not meet with the approval of many; but as the original impulse is alien, and as there are two rival groups, the closest parallels are with Edgar Pangborn's *A Mirror for Observers* and Philip José Farmer's *The Other Log of Phileas Fogg*. In mood it lies about midway between the two; it lacks the preciousness that mars so much of Pangborn's work, but such humour as it has consists mainly of leaden Anglo-American joshing plus one Ronald Reagan joke of unusual crassness, even for that genre.

The alien puppet-masters are not extraterrestrial but "paraterrestrial," being from a parallel Earth where progress was quicker. They detected our good selves and helped us along a bit, thereby founding Atlantis (in either the Atlantic or Antarctic, Lovegrove seems undecided), but the Atlantians, wanting more than the aliens were prepared to give, attempted an invasion for which they were punished as we know. On the allegorical level, therefore, this is a post-Tower of Babel story. Ever since then a clique of "Librans," working through human agents called "Guardians," has been attempting to ensure that we don't invent anything too baleful, given our social development. Meanwhile, a rival clique of "Anarchs" is all for encouraging us to invent whatever we like, and handing over the specs for yet more dangerous goodies, in the hope that we'll finish ourselves off and cease to be a threat.

Well enough, but some of the ideas are too tortuous to take seriously. For instance, the Librans don't like visiting Earth, so to communicate with their agents they inflict a London derelict with disturbing dreams of a symbolic nature, which he recounts to Rattray, the chief Guardian, who has them analysed by Kim, a Japanese computer freak, who passes her analysis (by what should be a secure channel but turns out not to be – surprise!) back to Rattray, who works out what to do. As they are quite capable of passing physical objects (mainly lethal hardware) between the worlds, my feeling is that a booklet of succinct instructions might have served the Librans better.

The tale is told mainly from the viewpoints of sundry Guardians, whose characters provide both the main interest and the book's ultimate failure. They like to think of themselves as the good guys, but as their preferred methods are theft and murder, and their victims are,

inevitably, among the most admirable and creative of the human race, they do occasionally experience a smidgen of doubt.

That's what makes the book so distasteful; they're not without scruples, they just never let them get in the way of the next round of mayhem, in cold blood or hot, for the sake of the Librans' concept of orderly progress. For instance, vacuum energy must be suppressed, as it would reduce the incomes of *inter alia* Colonel Gaddafi and Exxon, and we wouldn't want anything as destabilizing as that, now would we? At least those recruited by the Anarchs have no need to employ such dreary excuses about ends and means while "invalidating" their moral and intellectual betters, or to reassure each other that there are still *some* things they wouldn't do for the cause – secure in the knowledge that when they do them next time, no one will point the finger.

The effect is deeply depressing, both intrinsically and because Lovegrove on form is a brilliant writer – see my review of his *Days in Interzone* 129 – and his quality shows here and there, even in this dismal mish-mash. What induced him to write it I shudder to think, but I suppose every man has his price. Even more depressing is the prospect of more of the same – this is only the first about the Guardians. I hope the TV series bombs, so that James (without intermediate initials) Lovegrove can go back to doing what he does so excellently well.

In *The Republic* Plato suggested a typically sneaky way round those myths wherein the gods present a less than edifying example. Before such a myth might be recounted, a sacrifice from what would now be called a rare and endangered species would be required, so that eventually the tales of Zeus and Io, Apollo and Daphne etc. would perish from the world. Before letting anyone read Elaine Cunningham's *Evermeet: Island of Elves* (TSR, \$21.95) he would surely have required a holocaust of the entire Red Book.

This is lush, romantic hokum on the grandest possible scale, involving not only elves, orcs, dragons and numerous other supernatural races, but the entire pantheons of those races, and it ranges over the elvish heaven and hell no less than the worlds of lesser beings including men. It's more a chronicle with highlighted episodes than a conventional novel, its sense of *in medias res* deriving, I presume, from the existence of five earlier books set in the same universe. Suffice it to say that it involves a clash of Good and Evil, with much treachery by elves who in some cases still regard themselves as being on the side of Good, but find it more expedient to ally with Evil – on a strictly temporary basis, of course,

and mainly in the name of intra-elvish racial prejudice.

Nothing wrong with that, but as a chronicler Cunningham has a slight handicap: she lacks any feeling whatever for words. Her very best writing overlaps the very worst of Tolkien (from which it obviously derives), but elsewhere we meet innumerable instances of enjoined for conjoined, compliment for complement, eminent for imminent, council for counsel and (I swear I'm not making this up) one of millennia used as a singular form – in *this* Year of Grace! Rejoice, all ye who sanction the singular use of data, media, phenomena, bacteria and criteria!

I had a long drive to do recently and I decided to help the miles pass by with the aid of the eight-cassette pack of stories from Stephen King's last collection, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, bought some years ago and never played because, at the time, I'd only just finished reading the book itself. My oh my, but there's some wonderful stuff on there – not least Grace Slick's reading of "You Know They Got a Hell of a Band" – but by far the most successful (as far as I'm concerned) is King's own reading of "It Grows On You," surely one of his very best short stories.

The reason I mention it now is that, having just finished King's latest epic saga, *Bag of Bones* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99), I was trying to get down in one pithy sentence just why Bangor's Finest remains so popular. "It Grows on You" – with an opening paragraph that any writer worth his or her salt would surely give their eye-teeth to deliver – reminded me: it's because he tells *all* the story... even when all the story there is to tell is one pieced together (as in "It Grows on You") as a series of hearsay and rumours by a bunch of old cronies sitting around a pot-bellied stove in a General Store in Castle Rock.

Bag of Bones is no exception.

King has explained that he wanted to write one more really good scary story before hitting the milestone of 50 years old, a tale combining the romantic suspense of *Rebecca* and the sense of otherworldly terror that permeates *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Uninvited*. He also wanted to write about the US state of Maine again.

He's delivered the goods on all counts.

The coming weeks and months will see the usual barrage of reviews and, as is so often the case with artists (in all branches of the Arts) who have become huge successes, there'll be the inevitable (if, thankfully, infrequent) criticism that the book is too long and that King spends too much time filling in the background.

Don't believe a word of it.

At this point tradition demands that I curse her editor with wens and goitres, murrains and mange. Believe me, I would – if I thought TSR had an editor on its staff, or anyone who could define the word. It's an imprint new to me, but it belongs to the Wizards of the Coast, whose principal business is not publishing but gaming. That may explain why the book as an artefact made rather a bad impression. Someone has had the bright idea of calling it a Forgotten Realms book (though if that phrase occurs in the text I missed it), and registering that as a trademark. As the juvenile leads in sword-and-sorcery tend to venture into forgotten

and/or forbidden realms rather a lot, do the littoral wizards intend suing anyone who capitalizes the phrase? If they do, I hope someone asks how much they pay the Tolkien estate for each use of the word orc and its derivatives. Moreover, this book is divided into five named parts and 25 named chapters plus assorted bits and pieces, but no one has taken the trouble to prepare a contents page, nor is there a map or a chronology. I've seen better design on a bog-standard paperback, and the proof-reading is on a par with the editing. There's more to publishing than paying the printer.

Chris Gilmore

Telling It All

Peter Crowther

Certainly, if there's a fight scene in a kitchen, King will tell you what brand of ketchup is sitting on the table... and, spinning off into historical trivia about the people involved in the fracas, he'll probably tell you why that particular brand was chosen, amidst describing the progress and outcome of the punch-up. But the value is the sheer depth of his characters and their pasts, and that depth is nowhere more detailed than in the story of the hapless writer Mike Noonan who – bereaved by the death of his wife, writer's-blocked and unsettled by a repetitious nightmare – makes a pilgrimage to their old Maine summerhouse only to discover that his wife had been making

trips up there alone... without telling him. Other discoveries follow.

The supporting cast members – which include a great lawyer good-guy and a truly obnoxious, ancient, wheelchair-bound villain and his equally unpleasant attendant crone-nurse – are exceptionally well-drawn and the meticulously measured progress towards unearthing the full story is breathtaking.

King says that *Bag of Bones* is a summation of all he knows about lust, secrets and the unquiet dead. "If I had to describe it," he says, "I'd call it a haunted love story." But, of course, it's much, much more.

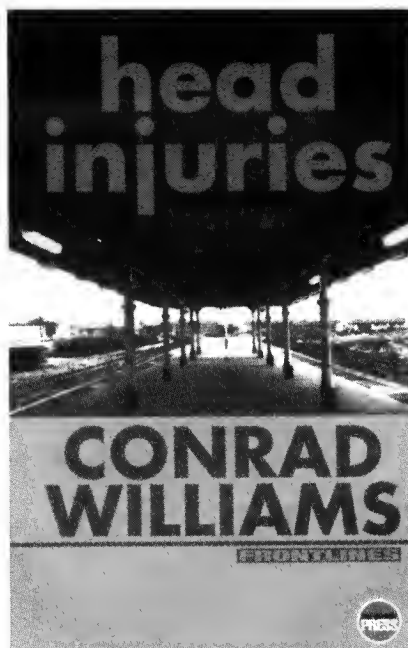
It concerns loss (a subject about which King has already shown himself to be a master-chronicler with the deaths of young Gage Creed in *Pet Sematary* and Carolyn Roberts in *Insomnia*); it concerns the creative process of writing (and the horror of drying up), the US legal system as it applies to child-custody, old wrongs long-hidden, and the ability of a close community to become a single entity; and it concerns a hunger for vengeance that continues even beyond the grave.

But most of all, it's a story that is more couched in the everyday world than in a world where strange things can happen and can be *expected* to happen... and that makes the strangeness all the more effective when it *does* happen.

I've rambled on for several years (and reviews) about wanting King to do something more akin to mainstream fiction: I think this book is the closest he's come to doing just that.

Maybe that won't please everybody but it suits me just fine.

There's a touch of King (circa *It*) about Conrad Williams's debut novel *Head Injuries* (The Do Not Press's Front Lines imprint, priced at a refreshingly whole £5) but make no mistake, a *laude cum honours* graduate of the "hard knocks" school of the so-called (among many other names) "slipstream" movement (which might, in part, explain the pub-



lisher's decision to market the book as "new/cult fiction"), Williams is his own man.

The complex story kicks off with a stand-alone prologue in which a young boy bullied by school peers douses his head in a combustible spray and sets fire to it, and then settles into detailing the return to Morecambe of 20-something David, called back by Helen, a one-time girlfriend for whom he still carries an Olympics-sized torch. Once re-installed in the out-of-season seaside town of his youth during what will be a hugely cathartic winter for all concerned, David is reintroduced to Seamus (whom he had never really liked) and, amidst a depressing setting of windswept promenades and wound-down holiday enterprises, he is told that someone is following them.

During a course of lonely pub-sessions and the kind of aimless parties David thought he had left behind forever, the three semi-reluctant "friends" gradually recall events from their earlier lives that had somehow effectively been erased from their memories. As this curtain of forgetfulness is raised, albeit painstakingly slowly, the follower increases the objects of his interest to three and a girl is murdered.

Although there are precious few laughs, there is some beautiful prose in this brooding and mysterious tale as it moves through to an inevitable confrontation with past situations, not least the horrific section detailing a potholing incident which should quell any interest a reader might have in venturing any further beneath the ground than their own well-lit basement.

Williams has fulfilled the promise of his shorter work with an intense and claustrophobic inner-city tale of spectral retribution, guilt and the callousness and aimlessness of youth. A first-class novel and a worthy debut publication for author and publisher alike. (And I have since heard that it has been optioned by Revolution Films.)

With *Eyes of Prey* (Gauntlet, \$35) author Barry Hoffman has achieved that rarity in book-publishing: a sequel (of sorts – it isn't necessary to have read the first volume) that surpasses the original work which spawned it – in this case, *Hungry Eyes*.

Treading the familiar ground of vigilantism inspired by the New York subway's angel of vengeance, Bernard Goetz (and, of course, Michael Winner's *Death Wish* and all of its laughable sequels and imitators), *Eyes of Prey* skilfully avoids cliché and the tired excesses of the "cut-and-slash" school of stalker novels by the sheer breadth of its character roll-call and the complex personal

agenda being followed by all of the players.

Stripper Lysette Ormandy confronts a young mugger on a subway, stepping in as the thug pistol-whips an elderly passenger to remove the gun and, when the youth then produces a knife, kills him. The other passengers, feeling guilty at their own lack of action, decide to cover up for Lysette and allow her to leave the train before reporting the incident... and even then, they ensure that the details they provide the police are confused.

The book could have ended there. The police recognize that the statements they're getting from the other passengers are deliberately incoherent and they further accept that the woman acted in the best interests: if she simply gives herself up for questioning, there will be no further action taken.

However, Lysette's own parents and sister were brutally murdered many years ago and she allows the other half of her personality – the brash and confident one she assumes in order to perform her role as a night-club stripper – to take over and call the shots. The outcome is that she then takes to the streets and places herself in situations that invite trouble, each time casually and effectively dispatching her attacker.

The media follows her exploits, christening her The Nightwatcher and inevitably causing a rise of vigilantism around the city. Parents stake out playgrounds used by addicts and pushers, burn down houses commonly known to be drugs warehouses and make it so the courts are unable to release offenders back into the community by means of an implicit threat that they will take retribution into their own hands.

There are several parties who are particularly interested in The Nightwatcher's activities: one is journalist Deirdre Caffrey, whose groundbreaking series of articles tracked down Shara Farris, the killer in *Hungry Eyes*; another is Shara Farris herself, who feels a deep empathy with the young woman; yet another is the detective specifically requested to pursue the case, who himself is no stranger to random violence and the human need to set things right; and still one more is a strange cabal of powerful businessmen who have their own reasons for restoring the status quo of the city... and thus for requesting a specific detective to lead the case.

Eyes of Prey is fast and furious, keeping descriptions of the violence to a minimum – without affecting the suspense – while jumping from player to player, inexorably bringing them together and changing the views of each during the course of the novel. Meanwhile, the narrative veers its roller-coaster path between police-

procedural, psychological thriller and, at least in part, a semi-supernatural who-what-why-done-it.

As he did in *Hungry Eyes*, Hoffman provides an entirely satisfactory and plausible ending without stooping to stereotype, leaving some questions while not exactly unanswered, at least open to further enlightenment. The good news is that third in the series (tentatively titled *Eye to Eye*) is already underway with a fourth (*The Eye of the Beholder*) at the planning stage.

Back in the early 1950s, when I was a smaller kid than I am now and had not yet partaken of the big-screen joy of the likes of *Angry Red Planet* and *It: The Terror From Beyond Space*, I discovered the real magic of science fiction courtesy of my parents' old radio set (then known, of course, as a wireless).

It would still be a few years before my English tutor would give the 11-year-old me a copy of *The Illustrated Man* and so the progress of my imagination had been limited by the black-and-white illustrations in a series of small comic books entitled the *Thriller Picture Library* (featuring Jet Ace Logan and his sidekick, Plumduff) and the British and Australian reprints of US comic books which could readily be found in every bookstore, market stall and bus and train depot in the land. I know that: I think I dragged my never-complaining parents around every one trying to pick up missing issues.

But then, one evening in either 1955 or early 1956, something came on the radio which made me pause in my Bayko construction-work (the '50s answer to Lego), ears pricked up like a dog listening for the clouds scraping across the moon. Swirling organ music gave onto a stentorian echoing voice which announced "Journey Into Space," and my life was irrevocably changed.

"Operation Luna," "The Red Planet" and "The World in Peril," the three series of *Journey Into Space* broadcast by the BBC in 1952-3, 1953-4 and 1955-6 respectively, all later appeared in book form – initially as hardcovers and then as beautifully-lurid Pan paperbacks (with "Operation Luna" appearing simply as *Journey Into Space*) – from their creator, Charles Chilton. But, while the written versions were a wonderful experience in themselves, it was the radio adaptations – each episode complete with cheesy "futuristic" sound effects, menacing background music and obligatory cliffhanging ending – that became forever lodged in my memory banks.

So it is particularly gratifying to discover, courtesy of a set of timely reissues from the BBC, that the old radio shows (albeit with the re-recorded 1957 version of the "Jour-

ney Into Space" sequence) are every bit as fascinating, enthralling and entertaining as my mind has been desperately trying to convince me over the past 40-odd years.

These wonderful stories – well-written, delightfully acted and beautifully produced – are surely just as mesmerizing to any fan of horror or suspense as they are to the dyed-in-

the-wool sf enthusiast, and I urge you to search them out. Each series is available as a nicely designed two-volume pack, each volume containing two cassettes (with pull-out sheets giving lots of background information, author notes, actor biographies and even colour reproductions of the original hardcover dust-jackets), for just £12.99 and there's a numbered,

slipcased edition containing all three series for £35.

Check it out for yourself – you'll be surprised at how much more effective your own brain's SFX are when compared with the cinema-bought CGI variety most recently foisted upon us in this summer's traditional blight of movie blockbusters.

Pete Crowther

Iblame Stan Gooch. For a long time after reading *The Paranormal* at an impressionable age I was unable to take the notion of time travel seriously: if time travel were ever going to exist, it would always have existed. Since then it has slowly dawned on me just how stupid I am, but there is residue, and I still can't approach a story like Brendan Carson's "Prozac Crusade" without lugging behind me my baggage of paradoxes. The author deserves credit, then, for making this standard time-travel fare (renegade pursued through the ages, history/future changing with each leap further back in time) quite convincing as well as sharp and amusing.

This is a debut story in the debut issue of an ambitious Australian magazine of speculative fiction called *Altair* (A5 colour paperback, 148pp, US\$10 or US\$20 two issues [overseas rates] from PO Box 475, Blackwood, South Australia 5051, Australia). Ambitious not only in terms of its production values but in its editorial policy, which editor Robert N. Stephenson hopes will remove "the borders of national and political division and [open] up a single marketplace for all writers, regardless of nationality and geographical division." This aggressive selecting of overseas stories, and its guiding principle, are admirable. Certainly excellent news for writers; only time will tell just how successful it will be in terms of attracting overseas readers, who are still faced with the same problems (real or imagined) as they are with any other magazine. For the time being, there does seem to be plenty of emphasis on the writer and the act of writing, with articles like Joe Haldeman's "Characterization" and Robert J. Sawyer's "Writing Great Beginnings."

Of the rest of the fiction, you would expect contributions from Ian Watson and Mary Soon Lee to stand out, and they do. Watson's "Starry Night" has some biting satire and some cracking one-liners, and is satisfying in a comforting, old-fashioned kind of way. Soon Lee's "Interior Landscape" is more personal: a man succeeds in rousing his wife from coma via a sort of radio link, the biodes implanted in his brain integrating themselves into her "synaptic structure, forming an interdependent network." The gadgetry becomes another component in a volatile human relationship, and

the story is appropriately insightful and touching.

The two main characters in Soon Lee's story are resolutely old-fashioned. In hospital after the operation the husband wonders if he now looks like "one of those weird teenagers, a Node – both eyes replaced by bio-ceramic balls – the implants' radio links continually exchanging information with the computer nets." The magazine as a whole – this issue of it anyway – seems equally traditionalist and nostalgic. Only once or twice does the approach fail – Kurt Von Trojan's "Paradise" is a pointless, far too literal and far too bad retelling of the Adam and Eve fable, and a couple of the translations are a little stilted – but the good stuff by far outweighs the bad. Traditional or not, *Altair* hits the ground running.

Considering it's also a debut issue, with perhaps a smaller budget, *Freudian Variant* (A4, 60pp, £2.25 from The Kent Fantasy Society, 68 Bellevue Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT11 8DN. NB: after #1, the maga-

zine is not available to non-members of the KFS, for which membership is £15/yr) also makes a fairly good impression. It's easily readable despite some horrendous lapses in typesetting which see, for example, some lines go missing entirely and two lines of an author biog getting orphaned on a page of Cathy Bubu-ruz artwork (about which I can only say that if you've seen one piece, you've seen them all).

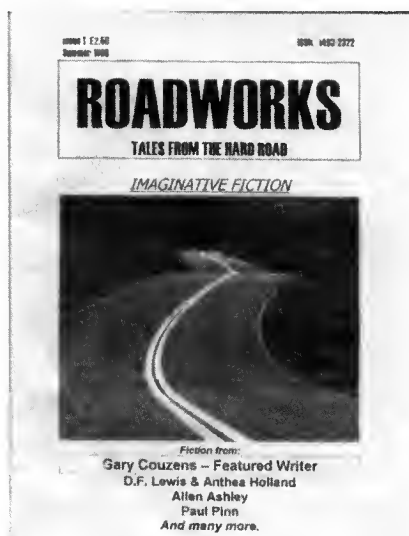
There are some quite well known authors here. Nicola Caines supplies a semi-magical fantasy called "Chicken Feather Woman and the Singing Forest," a nicely written account of an ordinary young woman's search for the extraordinary. Not surprisingly, I found the less genre-specific pieces like this to my liking. Clifford Thurlow's "Tail Lights" might not rank amongst his very best stories, but this subtle sliding between horror and gritty urban realism (which might actually be the same thing for some people) is pretty much up my street. Some very nice prose in David Murphy's "South Lake Road" too, the story of a man who has literally become a part of the forest in which he lives; and Ceri Jordan impresses as usual with some beautiful and sexy prose in "The Third Gift," a fairly slight and predictable tale of lesbian vampirism.

Of the non-fiction, David Mathew contributes a detailed interview with Ramsey Campbell (a bugbear of mine: I hate interviews presented as straight transcript), the editorial team review a couple of books and plug a selection of magazines (including this one), and Paul McIntosh tells "A History of *Knightmare*" (a TV programme apparently). All in all a good, solid foundation to build on.

Less successful overall than the other two, but still with its fair share of promise, is our third debut magazine, *Roadworks* (A4, 48pp, £2.50 or £9.50 four issues from Trevor Denyer, 7 Mountview, Church Lane West, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 3LN). A remarkably short time elapsed between the announcement and appearance of this magazine, and this first issue does have something of an "in-house" feel to it, half of its contributors belonging to the editor's own T-Party writers' group. I think this contributes to an uneven, rushed quality overall, both in terms of appearance (nowhere near the worst

Magazine Reviews

Andy Cox



example I've ever seen but there are still too many uneven columns, too much naff clipart and a couple of truly bad drawings) and content, the most substantial contributions being those involving featured writer Gary Couzens, who opens the issue as storyteller and closes it as interviewee (the interview is presented as transcript). Gary's story "Eskimo Friends" takes in, with aplomb, date rape, suicide, murder and one night when it all went wrong, while the interview, far too intricate to summarize, gives some fascinating insights into the man and the work.

It isn't all so successful unfortunately. Most of Michael O'Connor's "Late Night Shopping" concerns some bloke shopping and is as boring as it sounds. Then suddenly it turns out that the shop staff are vampires and he turns out to be a vampire killer. Feeble. "Remission" by Anthea Holland and D. F. Lewis is a potentially smart horror story about disease con-

taining some effective imagery but which too often verges on the unreadable. "The Mercy Seat" by Mark Leon Collins explores the roots of sadism but with little skill, so the story just comes across as ugly: "my girlfriend liked to be thrashed, and I liked to thrash her." Paul Pinn's "Sykona" is pretentious and silly, with painful lines like "Ripples lick pebbles. Fish flick moonlight. Star grains glint." "The Hand" by Anthony Lewing is clichéd beyond belief, and was surely dated at the time of its original publication in 1968. That it was later reprinted in a *Goosebumps* anthology will give you a clue as to the level of its sophistication. Quite what justifies its inclusion here I cannot imagine. Likewise the editor's own "Darkly Rising," not because it's especially bad but because, well, it's by the editor ("I couldn't resist including one of mine," he says, but surely he *should* have resisted).

There is some redeemably good

stuff here, though. The Gary Couzens story and interview, as I said, plus a typically innovative and witty short by Allen Ashley called "Notes Towards a Musical Breakdown" (being an analysis of the one fateful rendering of the 45rpm artefact "In Dreams" by K. G. Bollard), and "Wired" by L. H. Maynard and M. P. N. Sims, an extremely competent duo who are positively churning out traditional but highly readable supernatural mystery tales.

It seems as though I've come down hardest on *Roadworks*, but if its standards of acceptance are elevated it could have a bright future. It doesn't exactly belt out a mission statement but I find its openness to slipstream fiction and fiction that "defines a kind of coming of age" encouraging. It's a timely antidote to the slew of recent magazines whose avowed intent is to drag our genre(s) back into the dark ages.

Andy Cox

If the four books in this month's selection are anything to go by, then horror fiction (if I may be so bold as to use such a vilified term) is currently in a strangely compliant mood, for two reasons. The first is that the books are of comparable lengths (with the Christopher Fowler short stories being slightly shorter); and the second is that there's a reliance on the ephemera of our late-20th-century existence, even if, as is the case with the Michael Marshall Smith, we are looking at the future. Neither of which is a stunning observation. Far from it. The latter, especially, speaks volumes for the case that horror fiction demands the presence of the present for successful conveyance. Or so many writers would argue. (I did not put forward this argument. Disagree at your leisure, if you wish.) What I think is that the most successful horror fiction *in books* is that which describes the period in which the author was writing. It's a rare talent that can make the spooky swing when describing the past. Tom Holland makes it; Caleb Carr (in *The Alienist*, at least) does too...

Although I rate Ramsey Campbell's fiction highly, I'm not bowled over by the early Lovecraftian pastiches; when he started to find his voice (as he puts it) he learned how to scare. This is important. Ramsey Campbell's *The Last Voice They Hear* (Forge, \$24.95) is the first up. Geoff is a good guy: a loving family man, and a successful broadcaster of wrong-doing in the modern world. A Roger Cook figure, pointing out the obvious failings of children's homes, for one. But what has he left in his past? A brother: Ben – who has started to tease Geoff after many years of silence... Ben was always the black sheep of the family – the

one the parents (and other people besides) liked to pick on. Which is not to suggest that Ben was otherwise a misunderstood little darling; he robbed and lied, he played a horrible game with Geoff, when they were young, involving a knife and his own eye. Ben is not quite the full shilling, and Geoff knows it. And now he's calling, regularly.

When they were children, Geoff tried to deflect some of the verbal and physical beatings coming in Ben's direction. His kindness, years later, has come back to punish him. "Ben was intelligent all right. That was one of the things (the parents) hated about him. Too clever for his own good, that was their refrain." Now, Geoff is embarrassed that he hasn't mentioned Ben before; he has to keep his secret safe from his wife, while trying to discover Ben's identity. Ben states: "That's our secret, isn't it? Who I am and what. That's my present to you for old times' sake." Ben's a killer, and an all-round weird geezer; good at voices. He targets married couples, in a fashion

(one assumes) designed to point fingers at the dysfunctional family from which he finally emerged, thrashing and gnashing. The thought of the couple who have their lips glued together will stay with this reviewer for some time.

The parents of Geoff's wife believe something is going on: much good their suspicions do them. They're on Ben's list as well. And after a certain point, Geoff can't tell anyone; the opportunity has long since passed. He pretends to his wife that, okay, he didn't mention Ben, but that it doesn't matter either way. Not true. As the chapters weave between the past and the present, it becomes clear what sort of moral dilemma Geoff has always faced. In a similar way that the good boy in *The One Safe Place* ends up being just as capable of perpetrating violence, Campbell here presents a sharp moral choice. Should Geoff *continue* to protect his brother, or is it time to call a spade a spade? And when Geoff's son is kidnapped, what choices must Geoff face?

This book is closer in tradition and feel to *The One Safe Place* and *The Face That Must Die* than any of Campbell's supernatural outings. True enough, I read an American version of a novel that has no British publisher, but it didn't look like a Campbell book... or an *English* Campbell book, at least. I would hope this redirection in marketing will have beneficial effects.

Christopher Fowler's *Soho Black* (Warner Books, £8.99) is a brisk adventure into a London-based necropolis. Kind of. Four stories (minimum) are in an apocalyptic alignment; it's the reader's job to see at what stage the development is waiting...

Crimson Ephemera

David Mathew

Tyler is a movie executive with a lot of luck coming his way, or so he thinks. He's had some bad times: his child was born autistic; his partner has left him; he lives, in a sense, for his work, which isn't going too well either. Before long, he's been fired. He's a good guy (despite being in debt to thugs like One Eighty, so named because of his tendency to scour visually any room he enters for 180 degrees). He dies of heart problems; but not for long. Having shuffled off this mortal coil, he's dragged back, not exactly kicking and screaming – to approach the world of filmmaking with a new frame of mind. A confident one, to begin with. Tyler starts to swing at the business deals as a drunk does as the fences. But this is only part of the story.

A murder – grisly, in Fowler's tongue-in-cheek fashion – has been committed. Blood, with a bizarre residue of red butterflies. What can it mean? That's what Bryant and May (from Fowler's *Darkest Day*, 1993) must discover. A different man entirely seems like a demigod; a woman is in thrall to him. A young man working for Tyler is obsessed with a woman named Glory, who might or might not be of this earth. A leather-clad call-girl? Something more? Escapee from another Fowler novel? Read on.

Soho Black is flawed, but enjoyable. Quite aside from the recursive quality (that you will either love or ignore), Tyler needed to have died much earlier, I think; or the back-cover copy needed to have been radically altered. I was waiting for the death, believing it would be an early part of this book. By the time we reach it, it almost seems like an afterthought. Although I did not enjoy *Soho Black* as much as I did Fowler's excellent *Disturbia*, it is enjoyable. It's easy; it's fast and catchy. It explores the author's fascination with the city in which he lives. What the reader doesn't know about Soho before starting this book, he or she will be grateful for not knowing at the end. But the book is educational, in a sense. In the unlikely event that a wrap of cocaine should come my way, I now know precisely how best to utilize it in a public convenience. So... thanks. I think.

Michael Marshall Smith's *One of Us* (HarperCollins, £14.99) is brilliant. The cover states confidently that the thriller has just evolved, but I don't quite agree with this. Smith is not writing thrillers, whatever he believes – or at least, he's only writing thrillers in the sense that Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man* (1953) is a thriller. Smith has picked up Bester's baton, for this book, and run with it, long and hard. This novel, surely, is sf; why not push it as such? Because sf does not sell in the same

way. And no one likes sf anyway, do they?

The city is Los Angeles. Hap is a guy who starts off not into much of anything, but this quickly changes. Hap is a man on whom bad dreams can be dumped. For a while, this form of cerebral prostitution is a source of revenue. Hap does okay. And then his boss suggests he might go one step further: to take on people's memories – a highly illegal gambit. Hap goes for it. "Once a week a guy would lose the fact he was married, so he'd feel less guilty while he was spending the afternoon with his mistress. An executive would obscure an object lesson his mother had given him about morality, so as to make fucking over a colleague a little easier. A woman would forget something harsh she said to her little sister, minutes before a car mounted the kerb and killed her..." Hap is lumbered with the memories of a woman who has killed someone.

Which is only the beginning – because Hap isn't happy. If he's ever found in possession of the memories, he's "fucked." The police will poleaxe him; fillet him. So Hap decides he has to put the thoughts back in their donor brain. This is tangled with the fact that he manages to save said donor from a hot-bath-slit-wrist suicide, for which the suicidee is a long, long way from grateful. There are people on his trail, not to mention the Peelers, who want to know why the person killed (a policeman, by the way) has been bumped off. What does Laura have against the cop in question? And why does Hap's ex-wife come to the rescue when the baddies close in on a particular café? The police are always a step behind Hap.

Hap must rely on his friends to help him out with this one. "It's even

more like living inside a madman's head than it used to be..." One friend is the owner of a genuine sixth sense that means he can get out of situations before they decay into something awful...

It's charged and wonderfully written stuff. This was the first novel-length Smith I'd read, and I was impressed. The writing is like – as I say – Alfred Bester, but galvanized with a little James M. Cain (*Double Indemnity*, or something similar). Smith describes a drug called Fresh. Good Lord, I thought; if I was in that line of work, the money I could make... Just think of it. A drug that makes the user believe that each impression is the first he or she has ever encountered. Go ahead, and clean up with it. Or simply read this edifying prose.

And to finish, it's Fowler again, with *Personal Demons* (Serpent's Tail, £8.99). As far as I know, it's the first collection of his that appears without those ineffectual line drawings to illustrate the tales; so thank Blah for that at least. Here are 17 stories, but which are original and which reprints (apart from the two I've already read: "Spanky's Back in Town" and "The Grand Finale Hotel," both from Stephen Jones anthologies) is anyone's guess.

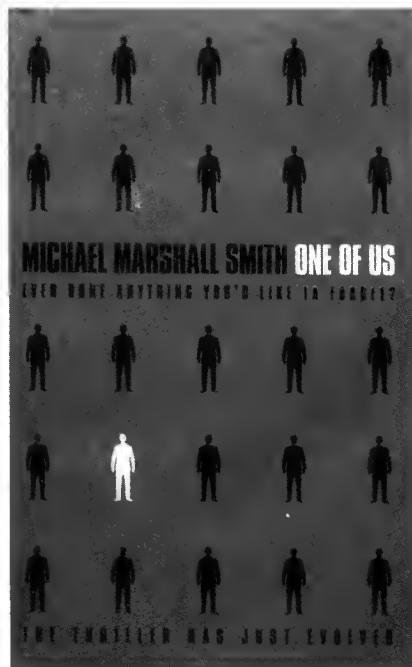
Who cares? you say. Okay. Point taken.

"Phoenix" is concerned with a man named "Brett Ellis" (do we sense an American psycho?) and a claim made that he is "one of the Chosen Ones." He wonders how exactly he's expected to change the world, and is led to the declaration that "All churches are online these days." In "The Man Who Wound a Thousand Clocks" a young man is compelled to do just that. "Inner Fire" concerns a time of great deliberation, following a great freeze. "Midas Touch" is a strand of narrative from *Soho Black*, which the author explains, to his credit. "Permanent Fixture" flirts with the neo-religion of football worship.

These stories are veined with Fowler's customary humour, bleak approach to the realities of blood-letting, and grim realism. If I'm honest, I prefer his novels to his short stories; but even so, this is an exciting showcase, and recommended.

So, in rounding up... what a strong line-up. I recall an interview with an author from about a decade ago, in which Ramsey Campbell was described as the Godfather. If that's so, then we have some effective bodyguards on his side; and the future of horror looks safe in their collective hands. The Godfather and his hitmen are on the prowl. This time next year, who knows what horror will look like, or why; so enjoy it, I say, for what it is today. Enjoy these crimson ephemera.

David Mathew



BOOKS RECEIVED



AUGUST 1998

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Arden, Tom. **The King and Queen of Swords: Second Book of The Orokon.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06371-8, 528pp, hardcover, cover by Kevin Jenkins, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; "Tom Arden" is the pseudonym of an Australian-born academic, lately of Queen's University, Belfast; Chris Gilmore gave a very positive review to the first volume in this proposed tetralogy [*Interzone* 125].) 1st October 1998.

Asaro, Catherine. **The Radiant Seas.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86714-X, 463pp, hardcover, \$26.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; fourth in the "Saga of the Skolian Empire" series, by a physicist-author who is praised for her "unique ability to weave a fine web of adventure, hard science and romance.") November 1998.

Bailey, K. V. **The Vortices of Time: Poems of Speculation and Fantasy.** Trifid Books [1 Val de Mer, Alderney, Channel Islands GY9 3YR], ISBN 0-9510574-4-8, 32pp, paperbound, £3 [postage and packing free – cheques payable to the author]. (Sf/fantasy poetry collection, first edition; the verses are light but skilfully made, and many of them are direct tributes to specific sf works, from H. G. Wells to Kim Stanley Robinson and beyond; recommended – if you have a taste for verse you can't go wrong at three quid all-in.) 10th August 1998.

Barton, William, and Michael Capobianco. **Alpha Centauri.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78205-7, 438pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; Barton and Capobianco's third collaborative novel.) September 1998.

Becker, Walt. **Link: A Novel.** Morrow, ISBN 0-688-15822-6, viii+388pp, hardcover, \$25. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this paleoanthropological thriller ["Link" = Missing Link, presumably] is another example of "mainstream" sf, though of a different kind to [e.g.] the Julian Rathbone novel listed below [although both deal in ideas about human origins]; this one, a debut book by a Californian screenwriter, appears to be aimed at the Michael Crichton readership and has already been sold to the movies; it's being given the "bestseller" push, and it comes with a publicity photo of the author which portrays him as a good-looking hunk; as ever in this unfair world, nothing succeeds like success.) November 1998.

Bradley, Rebecca. **Scion's Lady.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60161-2, 320pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1997; follow-up to the author's debut book, *Lady in Gil* [1996].) 6th August 1998.

Brooks, Terry. **A Knight of the Word.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-677-7, 311pp, hardcover, cover by Brom, £16.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; sequel to *Running with the Demon*.) 13th August 1998.

Brooks, Terry. **Running with the Demon.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-607-6, 303pp, A-format paperback, cover by Brom, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 13th August 1998.

De Lint, Charles. **Greenmantle.** "The classic urban fantasy novel..." Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-86510-4, 384pp, trade paperback, cover by David Bergen, \$14.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 48; it contains a revised two-page "Author's Note" at the rear, dated 1998.) 14th August 1998.

De Lint, Charles. **Trader.** Pan, ISBN 0-333-34935-X, 358pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fletcher Sibthorp, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 130.) 4th September 1998.

Douglass, Sara. **Battleaxe: Book One of The Axis Trilogy.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651106-6, 674pp, A-format paperback, cover

by Shaun Tan, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Australia, 1995; this Big Commercial Fantasy was Douglass's debut novel, and is now her first to be published in Britain; she is widely regarded as the best of the recent crop of Australian fantasy writers.) 7th September 1998.

Eddings, David and Leigh. **The Rivan Codex: Ancient Texts of The Belgariad and The Malloreon.** Illustrated by Geoff Taylor. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-42402-6, 394pp, hardcover, cover by Taylor, \$27.50. (Illustrated companion to the Eddings' various fantasy series, first published in the UK, 1998; proof copy received; it consists of a short "autobiography" of the character Belgarath the Sorcerer, together with various "holy books," "histories," "gospels" and other matter pertaining to his imaginary world.) October 1998.

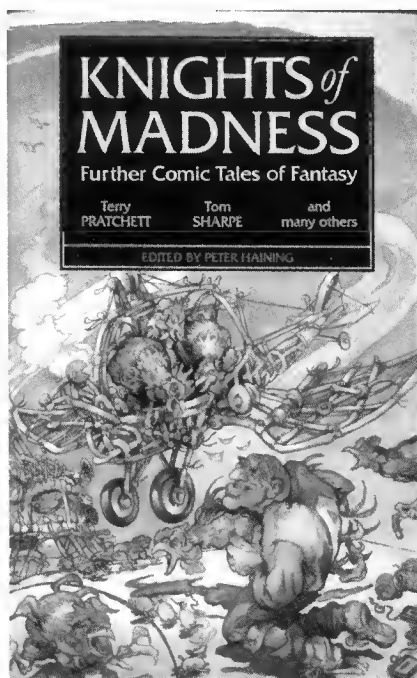
Egan, Greg. **Luminous.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-552-4, 295pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; Egan's second collection [apart from an Australian small-press item which contained three of these pieces], it comprises ten stories: seven from *Interzone* – "Chaff," "Mitochondrial Eve," "Mister Volition," "Transition Dreams," "Silver Fire," "Reasons to be Cheerful" and "Our Lady of Chernobyl" – and three from Asimov's – "Luminous," "Cocoon" and "The Planck Drive"; needless to say, it's highly recommended in these quarters.) 21st September 1998.

Foxe, Jocelin. **The Wild Hunt: Vengeance Moon.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79911-1, viii+312pp, A-format paperback, \$3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut novel, and apparently the first of a series; "Jocelin Foxe" is the pseudonym of Linda Reames Fox and Joyce Cottrell; it's one of Avon's "special price" paperbacks [only \$3.99 – the equivalent in Britain would be about £2.99] with minimal cover art – in this case the silhouette of a woman's head against the moon, head and moon both probably being "found" images from some DTP image-bank: it would be interesting to know how well these books are selling – certainly, we should all approve the publishers' effort to bring new writers to a mass audience at a low price.) September 1998.

Gemmell, David A. **Sword in the Storm.** "Book One in the Rigante Series." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03718-9, 364pp, hardcover, cover by John Howe, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it has a decidedly "Celtic" feel.) 10th September 1998.

Gray, Muriel. **Furnace.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-649640-7, 338pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1997; a second novel by this Glaswegian writer who is also known in Britain as an arts broadcaster; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 130.) 21st September 1998.

Haining, Peter, ed. **Knights of Madness: Further Comic Tales of Fantasy.** Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-63450-X, 252pp, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £16.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; 24 reprint stories, including work by, among others, Woody Allen, John Kendrick Bangs, L. Frank Baum, Peter S. Beagle, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, G. K. Chesterton, Philip K. Dick, Jerome K. Jerome, Spike Milligan, A. A. Milne, Mervyn Peake, the inevitable Terry Pratchett, Tom Sharpe, James Thurber, Ben Travers, Mark Twain, Donald E.



Westlake and Gene Wolfe; there's also a story by new young writer David L. Stone [born 1978 – not the "Doctor Who" novelist Dave Stone, who is at least 15 years older] which is probably his first professional sale; as with the previous two Haining anthologies in this series, some of the stories are what we would regard as sf rather than fantasy – including the one by Jerome K. Jerome, "The New Utopia" [from *Punch* – Haining says it dates from 1891, but internal evidence suggests a magazine appearance in 1889], which is a mordant little satire on egalitarianism anticipating Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" and many similar works.) 10th September 1998.

Harman, Andrew. **It Came from On High.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-678-5, viii+326pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £5.99. (Humorous sf/fantasy novel, first edition; it involves the Pope, the Turin Shroud and aliens from outer space.) 3rd September 1998.

Harness, Charles L. **An Ornament to His Profession.** Edited by Priscilla Olson. Introduction by David G. Hartwell. Afterword by George Zebrowski. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0809, USA], ISBN 1-886778-09-4, 537pp, hardcover, cover by James Stanley Daugherty, \$25. (Sf collection, first edition; published to mark the author's 50th anniversary as an sf writer, this is another splendid volume from the fan-based publishing house which has given us so many outstanding books in the past decade or so that it must now be considered the best sf publisher in the world ["NESFA" stands for New England Science Fiction Association, and this is something of a NESFA Press month – see also under Hauptmann and Leinster, below]; this book contains 17 good Charles L. Harness stories, ranging from his debut, "Time Trap" [Astounding, August 1948], to a new, previously-unpublished novelette, "Lethary Fair"; among the other pieces are his well-known novella "The Rose" [1953] and the title story [1966]; highly recommended.) 1st August 1998.

Harrison, Harry. **Stars & Stripes Forever.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40933-7, 338pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Alternate-history sf novel, first published in the UK, 1998; proof copy received; the opening volume of a new trilogy about a 19th-century war-which-never-happened between Britain and the USA.) 1st October 1998.

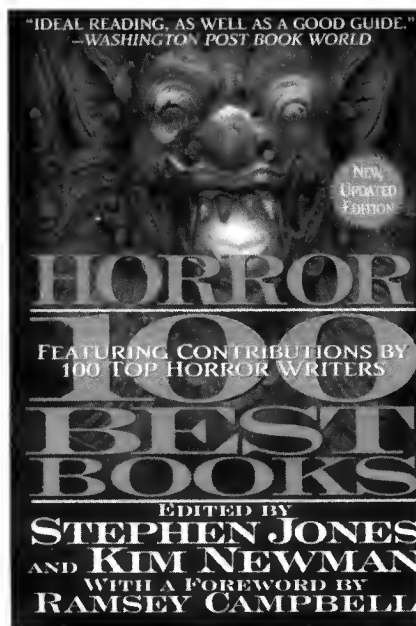
Hartwell, David G., and Glenn Grant. **North-east Stars: The Anthology of Canadian Science Fiction.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86475-2, 384pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1994; it contains stories by Canadian-born or Canadian-resident authors, including Michael Coney, Charles de Lint, Candas Jane Dorsey, Dave Duncan, Phyllis Gotlieb, Terence M. Green, Donald Kingsbury, Yves Meynard, Garfield Reeves-Stevens, Spider Robinson, Robert J. Sawyer, Elisabeth Vonarburg, Andrew Weiner and Robert Charles Wilson, among others; two of the pieces, William Gibson's "The Winter Market" and Glenn Grant's "Memetic Drift," appeared in *Interzone* [which fact is not mentioned in the copyright statement – grrr]; a few of the stories are translated from the French language; there is also a reprinted essay by Judith Merril, and copious notes and appendices by the editors; recommended.) 13th August 1998.

Hauptmann, Richard A. **The Work of Jack Williamson: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide.** Foreword by Frederik Pohl.

Afterword by Jack Williamson. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0809, USA], ISBN 1-886778-12-4, xvii+185pp, hardcover, \$17. (Sf/fantasy author bibliography; first edition; an excellent 70th-anniversary listing of the works of a very long-lived writer – first story published 1928, and still hard at it: there is a new story by Williamson scheduled to appear in the December 1998 issue of the revived *Amazing Stories*, marking the exact 70th anniversary of his first appearance in that very magazine; an interesting little feature here is a list of "Well-Known Terms That He Has Invented": did you know that Williamson is the coiner of "android," "genetic engineering," "psionics" and "terraforming"?) 1st August 1998.

Johnson, Oliver. **The Nations of the Night: Book Two of The Lightbringer Trilogy.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-600-9, 493pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 13th August 1998.

Jones, Stephen, and Kim Newman, eds. **Horror: The 100 Best Books.** Foreword by Ramsey Campbell. Revised and updated edition. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0552-3, 366pp, trade paperback, \$11.95. (Collection of short critical essays about horror fiction, arranged in chronological order, book by book, with contributions by Clive Barker, Stephen King, Terry Pratchett and 97 other well-known authors or critics; the first edition appeared in the UK from Xanadu Publications, 1988; winner of a Horror Writers of America Bram Stoker Award; this is the revised edition of 1992, as published in the UK by New English Library, with further small revisions, including a "Recommended Reading" list which has been extended to 1997; an extra-neous "The" seems to have crept into the title by accident [it is not so given on the book's cover]; highly recommended; within recent months, Carroll & Graf have also reissued my own *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* [1985] in trade paperback, but I had no forewarning of this and hence no opportunity to do any revisions; they did not send *Interzone* a review copy – David Pringle.) Not actually received for review: given to us by Stephen Jones in August 1998.



Keyes, Greg. **The Blackgod.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-663-7, x+494pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Wyatt, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA as by J. Gregory Keyes, 1997; it's "Chosen of the Changeling, Book Two," though the British publishers don't seem keen to state that.) 3rd September 1998.

Leinster, Murray. **First Contacts: The Essential Murray Leinster.** Edited by Joe Rico. Introduction by Hal Clement. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0809, USA], ISBN 0-915368-67-6, 464pp, hardcover, cover by Hannibal King, \$25. (Sf collection, first edition; 24 stories by Leinster [real name William Fitzgerald Jenkins, 1896-1975], a now sadly underrated author; again, NESFA have done a very useful job here: the book contains almost the entire contents of *The Best of Murray Leinster* edited by J. J. Pierce [Del Rey, 1978] and the similarly-titled but much skimpier *Best of Murray Leinster* edited by Brian Davis [Corgi, 1976] plus a few other pieces and, surprisingly, two previously-unpublished stories, "The Great Catastrophe" [a novelette written in 1919 and sold to *The Thrill Book*, which folded] and "To All Fat Policemen" [an undated non-sf short]; it just seems a pity Joe Rico did not see fit to include the author's famous early novelette "The Runaway Skyscraper" [Argosy, 1919] – that one was reprinted in *The Best of Amazing* edited by Joseph Ross [1967], if you can lay hands on such a long-out-of-print anthology; recommended.) No date shown, but probably a late entry: received in August 1998.

May, Julian. **Perseus Spur: An Adventure of the Rampart Worlds.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224669-4, 310pp, C-format paperback, cover by Stephen Bradbury, £10.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1998; the subtitle on the cover reads "The Rampart Worlds: Book 1"; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 131.) 17th August 1998.

Middleton, Haydn. **The Knight's Vengeance: A Mordred Cycle Novel.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-2370-4, 281pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Player, £5.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first published in 1997; a follow-up to *The King's Evil* and *The Queen's Captive*, it comes with praise from Sara Banerji, Tom Holt, Philip Pullman and others, and seems to be dark, bloody, Henry Treece-like stuff; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 126.) 13th August 1998.

Miller, Ron. **Firebrands: The Heroines of Science Fiction and Fantasy.** Text by Pamela Sargent. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-462-7, 112pp, very large-format paperback, cover by Miller, £14.99. (Sf/fantasy art portfolio; first edition; the paintings, and Sargent's text, deal with female characters from Fitz-James O'Brien's *Animula* [1858] and Rider Haggard's *Ayesha* [1887], through H. G. Wells's *Weena* [1895] and Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Dejah Thoris* [1912] to C. J. Cherryh's *Morgaine* [1976] and Lois McMaster Bujold's *Cordelia Naismith* [1986], among many others; an interesting book.) 17th September 1998.

Pratchett, Terry. **Carpe Jugulum.** Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40992-3, 286pp, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the 23rd "Discworld" novel, it's a vampire farce involving the three witches, Magrat, Nanny Ogg and Granny Weatherwax.) 5th November 1998.

Rathbone, Julian. **Trajectories.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06501-X, 288pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; this is a "millennial" mainstream offering from a well-established British novelist [20-odd novels, and twice a Booker Prize shortlistee in the past] who has not written sf before – although we believe he has produced some marginal near-future thrillers; according to the blurb, it's "not science fiction or fantasy," which of course is a sure sign that it is: set mainly in the year 2035, it also includes visions of humanity's remote past several million years ago.) 22nd October 1998.

Rice, Anne. **The Vampire Armand.** Chatto & Windus, ISBN 0-7011-6717-3, 388pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1998; proof copy received; the latest volume in the best-selling "Vampire Chronicles.") 1st October 1998.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Antarctica.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649703-9, 562pp, B-format paperback, cover by P. A. Nisbet, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1997; the master of California sf, author of the two best trilogies on the subjects of California and Mars, takes on the "the world's last unstripped asset," the great Antarctic continent itself, in his characteristic style of concerned, near-future, ecological sf; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 124.) 21st September 1998.

Sarti, Ron. **The Lanterns of God: Book Three of the Chronicles of Scar.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-73026-X, ix+305pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel [although the cover states "fantasy"], first edition; post-holocaust stuff, the disaster in this case having been caused by earthquakes, it's described as "the epic adventure of a devastated land once known as 'America'.") September 1998.

Sherman, David, and Dan Cragg. **School of Fire: Starfist, Book Two.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40623-0, 338pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jean Targete, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; militaristic adventure, set on another planet; we didn't see the first volume, and the authors' names are unfamiliar – however, they are far from young, both being Vietnam veterans and both having written a good deal of mainstream military fiction and non-fiction before now; so it seems Del Rey are continuing their quiet policy of using widely-experienced older authors for their new paperback-original sf [see our remarks under the listings for western writers Jake Page and Dan Parkinson, *Interzone* 133, page 64].) 1st August 1998.

Shetterly, Will. **Dogland.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86605-4, 445pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 125.) August 1998.

Silverberg, Robert, ed. **Legends.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-225666-S, xiii+S91pp, hardcover, covers [front and back] by Geoff Taylor and Josh Kirby, £17.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition [?]; all-original stories, each set in its creator's best-known world, by some of the most commercially-successful fantasy authors of recent years: Orson Scott Card, Raymond E. Feist, Terry Goodkind, Robert Jordan, Stephen King, Ursula Le Guin, Anne McCaffrey, George R. R. Martin, Terry Pratchett and Tad Williams – plus a story by Silverberg himself, set in his "Majipoor"

world; apparently David Eddings was also supposed to be in here but proved hard to get, or something: despite that lack, it's a pretty solid anthology which should do well.) 5th October 1998.

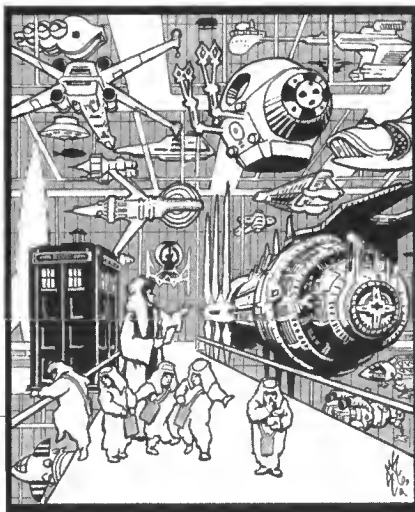
Strieber, Whitley. **Confirmation: The Hard Evidence of Aliens Among Us.** Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-81994-S, ix+290pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gambino, £15.99. (Pseudoscience text, first published in the USA, 1998; this is the first of his books that we have been sent in some years, but it seems that Strieber is still hard at it – writing endless follow-ups to *Communion*, his sensational alien-contact bestseller of a decade or so ago; S&S/Pocket Books have also sent us two simultaneously-released A-format paperbacks by Strieber, both first published in hardcover in 1997 – *The Secret School* [£5.99] and *The Communion Letters* [edited with Anne Strieber, £6.99] – which contain much more of the same.) 7th September 1998.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Six Moon Dance.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97479-7, 454pp, hardcover, cover by J. K. Potter, \$23. (Sf/fantasy novel; first edition; it's in the author's favoured planetary-romance mode; Ursula Le Guin and others praise her on the cover.) Late entry: 8th July publication, received in August 1998.

Watson, Ian. **Oracle.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60226-0, 287pp, A-format paperback, £5.99.

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.



Ashley, Mike, ed. **Shakespearean Detectives.** "Murders and mysteries based on Shakespeare's life and plays." Introduction by Edward Marston. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-SS9-0, vii+440pp, B-format paperback, £6.99.

(Sf novel, first published in 1997; about a time-travelling Roman centurion; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 123.) 20th August 1998.

Wilhelm, Kate. **Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang.** Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-86615-1, 254pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1976; winner of the Hugo Award as best sf novel of its year: a minor classic.) 11th September 1998.

Williamson, Chet. **City of Iron: The Searchers, Book One.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-78187-0, 340pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; this looks like standard paperback-original series exploitation fiction – in this case exploiting the popularity of *The X-Files*, which it's clearly designed to resemble; the note on the inside back cover tells us that Chet Williamson has published many novels and numerous short stories in genre magazines [which, of course, we knew], as well as stories "in *Playboy*, *The New Yorker* and *Esquire*"; *Playboy* and *Esquire* are impressive enough markets for a paperback-original hack [or, to put it more diplomatically, a latter-day pulpster] to boast about, but *The New Yorker*...? – come on, pull the other one!; this was considered an achievement, though one warmly hailed, for Ursula Le Guin to crack that market some years ago, and a few eyebrows were raised when Stephen King appeared there for the first time just recently...) August 1998.

(Historical crime-fiction anthology, first edition; as with its predecessor volume, *Shakespearean Whodunnits* [1997], this item of Bardic spinoffery does not really fall within our province, but it's well worth bringing to *Interzone* readers' attention since it contains original stories by, among others, Cherith Baldry, Paul Barnett, Stephen Baxter, Chaz Brenchley, Peter T. Garratt, Anne Gay, Lois Gresh & Robert Weinberg, Tom Holt, Phyllis Ann Karr, Andy Lane, David Langford, Stan Nicholls, Darrell Schweitzer, Peter Valentine Timlett and Peter Tremayne – all of whom have written sf, horror or fantasy at one time or another.) 27th August 1998.

Boucher, Chris. **Last Man Running.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40594-S, 251pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; "featuring the Fourth Doctor and Leela.") 7th September 1998.

David, Peter. **Thirdspace.** "Babylon 5." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-42454-9, 256pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first edition; based on a script by J. Michael Straczynski for a feature-length episode.) Late entry: 1st July publication, received in August 1998.

Duncan, Jody. **The Making of The X-Files: Fight the Future.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224688-0, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £9.99. (Heavily illustrated account of the making of the sf movie written and produced by Chris Carter; first published in the USA, 1998.) 3rd August 1998.

Hand, Elizabeth. **The X-Files: Fight the Future.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-6S1190-2, 219pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1998; based on a script by Chris Carter – who, of course, was also the creator of the TV series from which this feature film is a spinoff; as with earlier Elizabeth Hand novel-

izations of Carter's *Millennium* TV series, the text is brief – padded out with large print and lots of white space; *Voyager* have also sent us a juvenile version of the same book – ISBN 0-00-651189-2, 153pp, B-format, priced at £4.99.) 10th August 1998.

Hanley, Richard. **Is Data Human?: The Metaphysics of Star Trek.** Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2453-0, xvii+253pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Popular philosophy text; first published in the USA, 1997; this has been yoked into the series of pop-science books [see below], initiated by Lawrence M. Krauss's *The Physics of Star Trek* [1995], which attempts to use the popularity of the sf TV series to teach some real knowledge – or in this case, some "real" metaphysics; the author is an Australian academic, and his book originated with a different American publisher from the other volumes.) 18th September 1998.

Howe, David J., and Stephen James Walker. **Doctor Who: The Television Companion.** BBC Books, 0-563-40588-0, 557pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Sf TV-series companion, first edition; with well over 500 pages of small print, this is a big book, with apparently complete episode guides to a show which ran for over two-and-a-half decades; recommended to fanatics.) 7th September 1998 [but withdrawn "until later in the year... due to inconsistent quality during printing"].

Jenkins, Susan and Robert. **The Biology of Star Trek.** Foreword by Lawrence M. Krauss. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2469-7, xiii+189pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Popular science text; first published in the USA, 1998; this is one of a series of books, initiated by Lawrence M. Krauss's *The Physics of Star Trek* [1995], which attempts to use the popularity of the sf TV series to teach some serious science; a commendable venture.) 18th September 1998.

Killick, Jane. **Babylon 5 Season by Season, 5: The Wheel of Fire.** Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2171-X, 188pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf TV-series history and companion, first edition; covering the fifth season of the series, it also contains eight pages of colour photographs.) 4th September 1998.

Krauss, Lawrence M. **Beyond Star Trek: Physics from Alien Invasions to the End of Time.** Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2464-6, xii+190pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Popular science text; first published in the USA, 1997; another of the worthy series, begun with Krauss's *The Physics of Star Trek* [1995], which uses the popularity of the sf TV show to promulgate some real science; it's dedicated, fittingly, to the memory of Carl Sagan.) 18th September 1998.

Magrs, Paul. **The Scarlet Empress.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40595-3, 283pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; "featuring the Eighth Doctor and Sam"; this author is

new to the series, and is described in the accompanying publicity sheet as "an accomplished writer who has had novels published by Chatto & Windus and Vintage"; does the title make conscious reference to the classic Josef Von Sternberg-Marlene Dietrich movie of 1935? – yes: in an interesting afterword, Paul Magrs, who seems to have been born circa 1970, who has a PhD in Eng. Lit. and who describes himself as a "literary novelist," makes the following statement: "I'm indebted to a curious imbroglia of texts and authors. In no particular order... The Arabian Nights themselves, of course, Laura Riding, Angela Carter, Robert Irwin [for his fabulous *Arabian Nights Companion*], Salman Rushdie, Ray Bradbury, R. A. Lafferty, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, Josef Von Sternberg, Fellini's *Satyricon*, Ray Harryhausen, Allen Ginsberg, Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges, Jean Cocteau, Collette, Susan Sontag, Aubrey Beardsley, Casanova, Marina Warner... and so on and so on"; phew!) 7th September 1998.

Mortimore, Jim, with Allan Adams and Roger Clark. **Babylon 5 Security Manual.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-42453-0, 160pp, very large-format paperback, \$18.95. (Copiously illustrated companion to sf television series created by J. Michael Straczynski; first published in the UK, 1997.) Late entry: 11th June publication, received in August 1998.

nostalgia – not for the film, since we were too old for that, but for the British comics of our childhood which were full of such cross-section illustrations of warplanes, battleships, etc [including Dan Dare's spaceships]; it's beautifully done, as one might expect of Dorling Kindersley.) 22nd October 1998.

Reynolds, David West. **Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary.** Models by Don Bies and Nelson Hall. Photographs by Alexander Ivanov. Dorling Kindersley, ISBN 0-7513-7081-9, 64pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Large-format, lavishly illustrated guide to the characters and creatures in the *Star Wars* sf-movie series created by George Lucas; first edition; Dorling Kindersley have evidently negotiated a franchise with Lucasfilm, and this and the above title are the first in a series of books where they lend their expertise in visual publishing to the reimagining of the Lucas universe: more will follow in 1999, they say, to accompany the long-promised new *Star Wars* film.) 22nd October 1998.

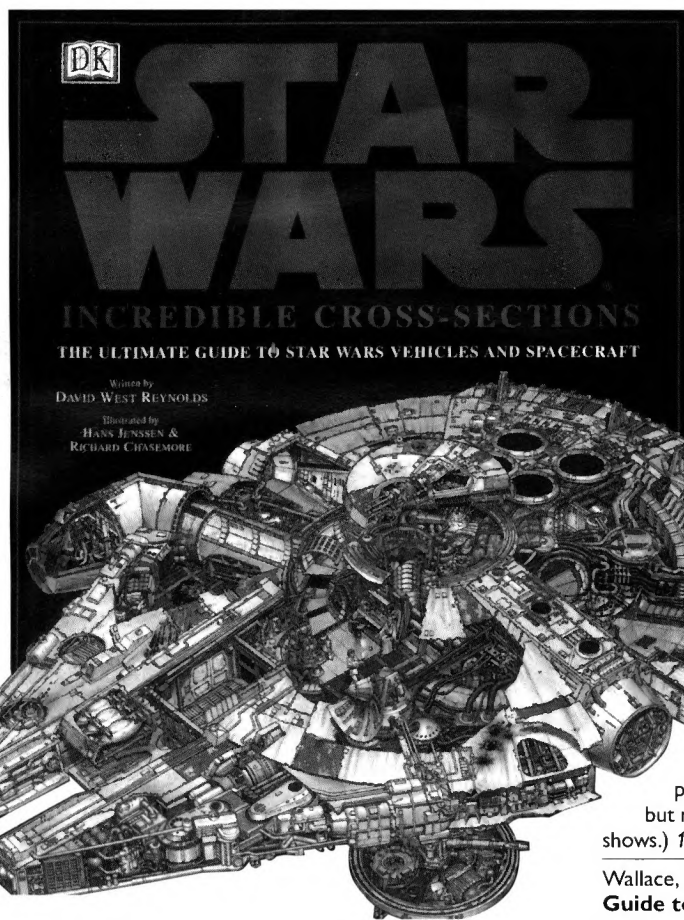
Siegel, Scott, ed. **Tales from Tethedril.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39444-5, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, \$6.99. (Shared-world/sharecrop fantasy anthology, first edition; it's described as "building on a story by R. A. Salvatore"; contributors include Elaine Cunningham, Ed Greenwood,

Mary Kirchoff, Douglas Niles, Dan Parkinson and, of course, Salvatore – all familiar names from the *T5R/DragonLance* stable, although this is not a *T5R* franchise but is copyright "Siegel & Siegel Ltd.") 1st August 1998.

Van Hise, James. **Hercules & Xena: The Unofficial Companion.** Renaissance Books [distributed in the UK by Turnaround, Unit 3, Olympia Trading Estate, Coburg Rd., London N22 6TZ], ISBN 1-58063-001-4, 270pp, trade paperback, cover by David McMacken, £10.99. (Illustrated companion to the TV fantasy series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*; first published in the USA, 1998; this is the American first edition

with a British price added; as well as details of the making of the two series, with episode guides, it contains background material on *Hercules* in Greek myth and in the popular cinema; joky and superficial, but no doubt useful to fans of the TV shows.) 13th August 1998.

Wallace, Daniel. **Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Planets and Moons.** Illustrated by Brandon McKinney and Scott Kolins. Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2333-X, xvii+204pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Illustrated guide to the imaginary worlds of the *Star Wars* sf-movie series created by George Lucas; first published in the USA, 1998; this is the fourth in the *Star Wars: Essential Guide* series – cynics might say that nothing less essential than these books is imaginable, but then who wants to be a cynic?) 21st August 1998.



Reynolds, David West. **Star Wars: Incredible Cross-Sections.** Illustrated by Hans Jenssen and Richard Chasemore. Dorling Kindersley, ISBN 0-7513-7080-0, 32pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Very large-format, lavishly illustrated guide to the vehicles and spacecraft in the *Star Wars* sf-movie series created by George Lucas; first edition; for those of us who were already adult when *Star Wars* first came out in 1977 this is a book to provoke



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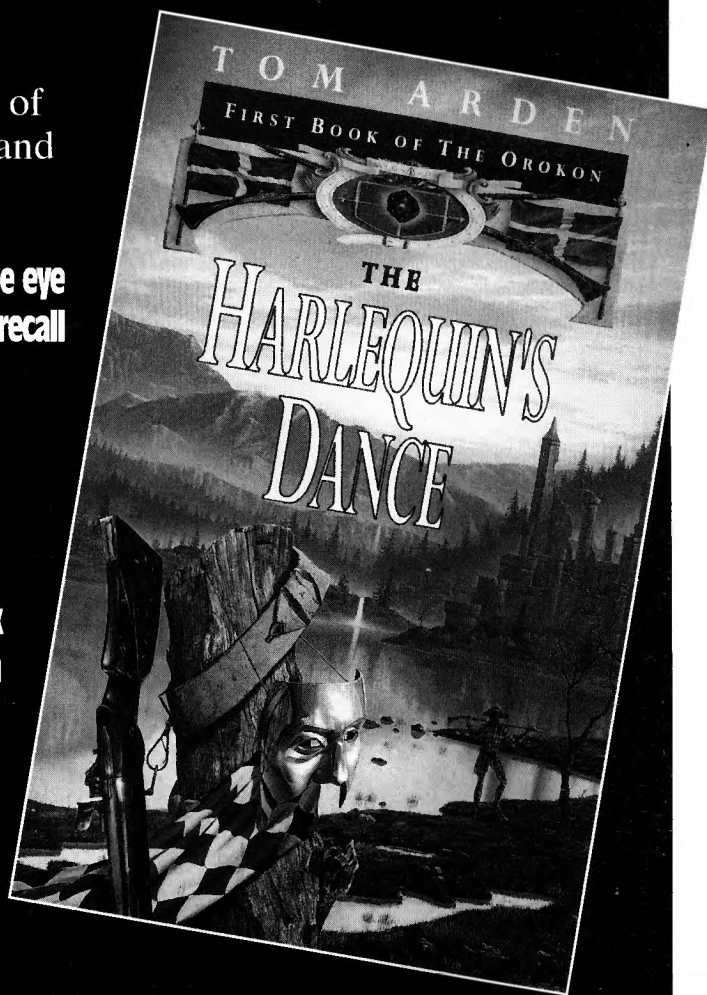
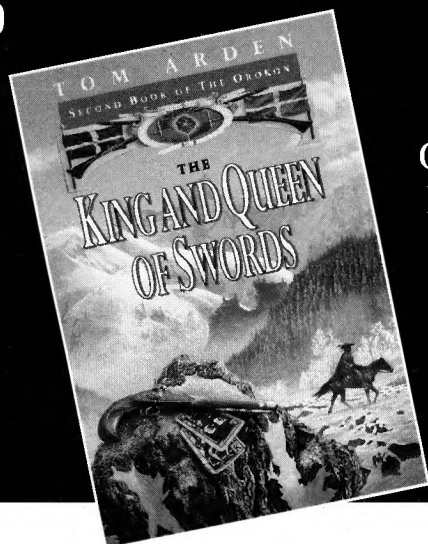
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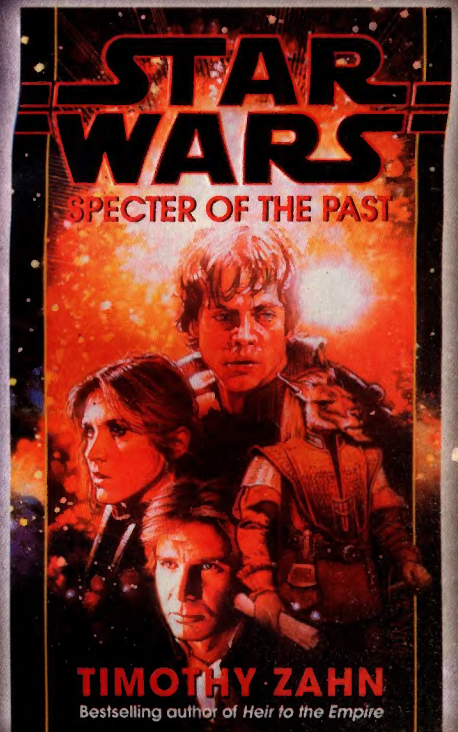


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